LETTERS

OF THE

BRITISH SPY.

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Sir Jagir Rajah. 1827

THE

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BRITISH SPY.

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THE People of the United States of America have so very small a claim on the world for any particular mark of distinction for honours gained in the field of literature, that it is feared the present demand on the English Reader may be considered more as a call on British courtesy and benevolence than one of right and equity.

In whatever point of view this may appear, the Reader may rely, that the Publishers have been induced, from a conviction of the merit of the Work, to furnish an impression of THE BRITISH SPY. *They have been enabled to do this by the recent arrival of a gentleman from Baltimore, who brought with him a copy*

of the Work, with the assurance, that no original American literary production had ever obtained so rapid and extensive a circulation; it having, in a very short space of time, passed through four editions. The first English Edition of the Work is now presented to the Public, as a specimen of American literature highly flattering to the rising genius of that nation.

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE

Fourth American Edition.

THE Publisher having become possessed of a copy of "The British Spy," which has passed through the hands of the author, eagerly embraces an opportunity of submitting a correct edition of that work to the patronage of the Public. These letters were originally inserted in a daily journal; and they appeared with all the imperfections to which such a mode of publication is unavoidably liable. In the present edition, a variety of errors have been corrected; and nothing has been spared which it was supposed could add to its value.

Of the literary merits of a work which has passed the ordeal of criticism with honour, not only to the author but to his country, it would be impertinent to speak. Common fame has decided it to be the fruit of an American pen; and classical taste has pronounced it to be the offspring of genius. To those who would inculcate the degrading doctrine, that this is the country

"Where Genius sickens and where Fancy dies*,"

we could offer the letters of the British Spy as an unquestionable evidence that America is entitled to a high rank in the republic of letters; and that the empyreal flame may be respired under any region.

* Clifton.

THE

BRITISH SPY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE VIRGINIA ARGUS.

SIR,

THE manuscript from which the following letters are extracted, was found in the bedchamber of a boarding-house in a sea-port town of Virginia. The gentleman, who had previously occupied that chamber, is represented by the mistress of the house to have been a meek and harmless young man, who meddled very little with the affairs of others, and concerning whom no one appeared sufficiently interested to make any inquiry. As it seems from the manuscript that the name by which he passed was not his real name, and as, moreover, she knew nothing of his resi-

dence, so that she was totally ignorant to whom and whither to direct it, she considered the manuscript as lawful prize, and made a present of it to me. It seems to be a copy of letters written by a young Englishman of rank, during a tour through the United States, in 1803, to a member of the British parliament. They are dated from almost every part of the United States, contain a great deal of geographical description, a delineation of every character of note among us, some literary disquisitions, with a great mixture of moral and political observation. The letters are prettily written. Persons of every description will find in them a light and agreeable entertainment; and to the younger part of your readers they may not be uninstructive. For the present I select a few which were written from this place, and, by way of distinction, will give them to you under the title of *The British Spy.*

LETTER I.

Richmond, September 1.

You complain, my dear S......., that although I have been resident in Richmond upwards of six months, you have heard nothing from me since my arrival. The truth is, that I had suspended writing until a more intimate acquaintance with the people and their country should furnish me with the materials for a correspondence. Having now collected those materials, the apology ceases, and the correspondence begins. But first, a word of myself.

I still continue to wear the mask, and most willingly exchange the attentions

which would be paid to my rank, for the superior and exquisite pleasure of inspecting this country and this people, without attracting to myself a single eye of curiosity, or awakening a shade of suspicion. Under my assumed name, I gain an admission close enough to trace, at leisure, every line of the American character; while the plainness, or rather humility of my appearance, my manners and conversation, put no one on his guard, but enable me to take the portrait of nature, as it were, asleep and naked. Besides, there is something of innocent roguery in this masquerade which I am playing, that sorts very well with the sportiveness of my temper. To sit and decoy the human heart from behind all its disguises; to watch the capricious evolutions of unrestrained nature, frisking, curveting and gamboling at her ease, with the curtain of ceremony drawn up to the very sky—O! it is delightful!

You are perhaps surprised at my speaking of the attentions which would be paid in this country to my rank. You will suppose that I have forgotten where I am: no such thing. I remember well enough that I am in Virginia, that state, which of all the rest plumes herself most highly on the democratic spirit of her principles. Her political principles are, indeed, democratic enough in all conscience. Rights and privileges, as regulated by the constitution of the state, belong in equal degree to all the citizens; and Peter Pindar's remark is perfectly true of the people of this country, that "every blackguard scoundrel is a king*." Nevertheless, there exists in Virginia a species of social rank, from which no country can, I presume, be entirely free. I mean that kind of rank which arises from the different degrees of wealth and of intellectual refinement. These must introduce a style of living

* The reader needs scarcely to be reminded that the writer is a Briton, and true to his character.

and of conversation, the former of which a poor man cannot attain, while an ignorant one would be incapable of enjoying the latter. It seems to me, that from these causes, wherever they may exist, circles of society, strongly discriminated, must inevitably result. And one of these causes exists in full force in Virginia; for however they may vaunt of "equal liberty in church and state," they have but little to boast on the subject of equal property. Indeed there is no country, I believe, where property is more unequally distributed than in Virginia. This inequality struck me with peculiar force in riding through the lower counties on the Potomak. Here and there a stately aristocratic palace, with all its appurtenances, strikes the view: while all around, for many miles, no other buildings are to be seen but the little smoky huts and log cabins of poor, laborious, ignorant tenants. And, what is very ridiculous, these tenants, while they approach *the great house*, cap in hand,

with all the fearful trembling submission of the lowest feudal vassals, boast in their court-yards, with obstreperous exultation, that they live in a land of freemen, a land of equal liberty and equal rights! Whether this debasing sense of inferiority, which I have mentioned, be a remnant of their colonial character, or whether it be that it is natural for poverty and impotence to look up with veneration to wealth and power and rank, I cannot decide. For my own part, however, I have ascribed it to the latter cause; and I have been in a great degree confirmed in the opinion, by observing the attentions which were paid by the most genteel people here to ...., the son of Lord ....

You know the circumstances in which his lordship left Virginia: that so far from being popular, he carried with him the deepest execrations of these people. Even now, his name is seldom mentioned here but in connection with terms of abhor-

rence or contempt. Aware of this, and believing it impossible that .... was indebted to his father for all the parade of respect which was shown to him, I sought, in his own personal accomplishments, a solution of the phenomenon. But I sought in vain. Without one solitary ray of native genius, without one adventitious beam of science, without any of those traits of soft benevolence which are so universally captivating, I found his mind dark and benighted, his manners bold, forward, and assuming, and his whole character evidently inflated with the consideration that he was the son of a lord. His deportment was so evidently dictated by this consideration, and he regarded the Virginians so palpably in the humiliating light of inferior plebeians, that I have often wondered how such a man, and the son too of so very unpopular a father, escaped from this country without personal injury, or, at least, personal insult. I am now persuaded that this impunity, and the

great respect which was paid to him, resulted solely from his noble descent, and was nothing more than the tribute which man pays either to imaginary or real superiority. On this occasion, I stated my surprise to a young Virginian, who happened to belong to the democratic party. He, however, did not choose to admit the statement; but asserted, that whatever respect had been shown to ...., proceeded solely from the federalists; and that it was an unguarded evolution of their private attachment to monarchy and its appendages. I then stated the subject to a very sensible gentleman, whom I knew to belong to the federal phalanx. Not willing to degrade his party by admitting that they would prostrate themselves before the empty shadow of nobility, he alleged that nothing had been manifested towards young .... beyond the hospitality which was due to a genteel stranger; and that if there had been any thing of parade on his account, it was

attributable only to the ladies, who had merely exercised their wonted privilege of coquetting it with a fine young fellow. But notwithstanding all this, it was easy to discern in the look, the voice, and whole manner, with which gentlemen as well as ladies of both parties saluted and accosted young ...., a secret spirit of respectful diffidence, a species of silent, reverential abasement, which, as it could not have been excited by his personal qualities, must have been homage to his rank. Judge, then, whether I have not just reason to apprehend, that on the annunciation of my real name, the curtain of ceremony would fall, and nature would cease to play her pranks before me.

Richmond is built, as you will remember, on the north side of James river, and at the head of tide water. There is a manuscript in this state which relates a curious anecdote concerning the origin of this town The land hereabout was owned

by Colonel William Byrd. This gentleman, with the former proprietor of the land at the head of tide water on Appomatox river, was appointed, it seems, to run the line between Virginia and North Carolina. The operation was a most tremendous one; for, in the execution of it, they had to penetrate and pass quite through the great Dismal Swamp. It would be almost impossible to give you a just conception of the horrors of this enterprise. Imagine to yourself an immense morass, more than forty miles in length and twenty in breadth, its soil a black, deep mire, covered with a stupendous forest of juniper and cypress trees, whose luxuriant branches, interwoven throughout, intercept the beams of the sun and teach day to counterfeit the night. This forest, which until that time, perhaps, the human foot had never violated, had become the secure retreat of ten thousand beasts of prey. The adventurers, therefore, beside the almost endless labour of felling

trees in a proper direction to form a footway throughout, moved amid perpetual terrors, and each night had to sleep *en militaire*, upon their arms, surrounded with the deafening soul-chilling yell of those hunger-smitten lords of the desert. It was one night, as they lay in the midst of scenes like these, that Hope, that never-failing friend of man, paid them a consoling visit, and sketched in brilliant prospect, the plans of Richmond and Petersburg *.

Richmond occupies a very picturesque and most beautiful situation. I have never met with such an assemblage of striking and interesting objects. The town, dispersed over hills of various shapes; the river descending from west to east, and obstructed by a multitude of small islands, clumps of trees, and myriads of rocks;

* So, at least, speaks the manuscript account which Colonel Byrd has left of this expedition, and which is now in the hands of some of his descendants; perhaps of the family at Westover.

among which it tumbles, foams, and roars; constituting what are called The Falls; the same river, at the lower end of the town, bending at right angles to the south, and winding reluctantly off for many miles in that direction; its polished surface caught here and there by the eye, but more generally covered from the view by trees; among which the white sails of approaching and departing vessels exhibit a curious and interesting appearance: then, again, on the opposite side, the little town of Manchester, built on a hill, which, sloping gently to the river, opens the whole town to the view, interspersed, as it is, with vigorous and flourishing poplars, and surrounded to a great distance by green plains and stately woods—all these objects, falling at once under the eye, constitute, by far, the most finely varied and most animated landscape that I have ever seen. A mountain, like the Blue Ridge, in the western horizon, and the rich tint with which the hand of a Pennsylvanian farmer would

paint the adjacent fields, would make this a more enchanting spot than even Damascus is described to be.

I will endeavour to procure for you a perspective view of Richmond, with the embellishments of fancy which I have just mentioned; and you will do me the honour to give it a place in your pavilion.

Adieu, for the present, my dear S.......! May the perpetual smile of heaven be yours!

LETTER II.

Richmond, September 7.

ALMOST every day, my dear S......., some new evidence presents itself in support of the Abbé Raynal's opinion, that this continent was once covered by the ocean, from which it has gradually emerged. But that this emersion is, even comparatively speaking, of recent date, cannot be admitted; unless the comparison be made with the creation of the earth; and even then, in order to justify the remark, the era of the creation must, I fear, be fixed much further back than the period which has been inferred from the Mosaic account *.

* Some error has certainly happened in computing the era of the earth's creation from the five books of Moses. Voltaire informs us, that certain French philosophers, who visited China, inspected the official register or history of the eclipses of the sun and moon, which, it seems, has been con-

The following facts are authenticated beyond any kind of doubt: During the last spring, a gentleman in the neighbourhood of Williamsburg, about sixty miles below this place, in digging a ditch on his

tinually kept in that country; that on calculating them back, they were all found correct, and conducted those philosophers to a period (I will not undertake to speak with certainty of the time, but I think) twenty-three centuries before the Mosaic era. It is notorious, however, that the Chinese plume themselves on the antiquity of their country; and in order to prop this, it would have been just as easy for the Chinese astronomers to have fabricated and dressed up the register in question, by posterior calculations, as for the French astronomers to have made their retrospective examination of the accuracy of those eclipses. The same science precisely was requisite for both purposes; and although the improvement of the arts and sciences in China was found, by the first Europeans who went amongst them, to bear no proportion to the antiquity of the country, yet there is no reason to doubt that the Chinese mandarins were at least as competent to the calculation of an eclipse as the shepherds of Egypt. Indeed we are, I believe, expressly told, that the Chinese, long before they were visited by the people of Europe, had been in the habit of using a species of astronomical apparatus, and of stamping almanacks from plates or

farm, discovered, about four or five feet below the surface of the earth, a considerable portion of the skeleton of a whale. Several fragments of the ribs and other parts of the system were found; and all

blocks, many hundred years even before printing was discovered in Europe. I see no great reason, therefore, to rely with very implicit confidence on the register of China. Indeed I am very little disposed to build my faith, as to any historical fact, on evidence perfectly within the reach of human art and imposture; comprehending all writings, inscriptions, literary or hieroglyphic, medals, &c. which tend either to flatter our passion for the marvellous, or to aggrandize the particular nation in whose bosom they are found. And, therefore, together with the Chinese register, I throw out of the consideration of this question another record, which goes to the same purpose: I mean the Chaldaic manuscript found by Alexander in the city of Babylon.

The inferences reported by Mr. Brydone, as having been drawn by Recupero from the *lavas* of Mount Etna (those stupendous records which no human art or imposture could possibly have fabricated) deserve, I think, much more serious attention. They are subject, indeed, to one of the preceding objections: to wit, that the data, from which all the subsequent calculations are drawn, are inscriptions; appealing not only to our passion for

the *vertebræ* regularly arranged, and very little impaired as to their figure. The spot on which this skeleton was found, lies about two miles from the nearest shore of James river, and fifty or sixty from the

the marvellous, but flattering the vanity of the Sicilians, by establishing the great age of their mountain, at once their curse and their blessing. These inscriptions, however, do not rest merely on their own authority: they allege a fact which is very strongly countenanced by recent and unerring observation. As Brydone may not be in the hands of every person who may chance to possess and read this *bagatelle*, and as this subject is really curious and interesting, I beg leave to subjoin those parts of that traveller's highly entertaining letters, which relate to it.

"The last *lava* we crossed, before our arrival there, [*Jaci Reale*] is of vast extent. I thought we never should have had done with it: it certainly is not less than six or seven miles broad, and appears in many places to be of an enormous depth.

"When we came near the sea, I was desirous to see what form it had assumed in meeting with the water. I went to examine it, and found it had driven back the waves for upwards of a mile, and had formed a large, black, high promontory, where, before, it was deep water. This *lava*, I imagined, from its barrenness, for it is as yet covered with a very scanty soil, had run from the mountain only a

Atlantic ocean. The whole phenomenon bore the clearest evidence that the animal had perished in its native element; and as the ocean is the nearest resort of the whale, it follows that the ocean must once have

few ages ago; but was surprised to be informed by Signior Recupero, the historiographer of Etna, that this very *lava* is mentioned by Diodorus Siculus to have burst from Etna in the time of the second Punic war, when Syracuse was besieged by the Romans. A detachment was sent from Tauro-minum to the relief of the besieged; they were stopped on their march by this stream of lava, which having reached the sea before their arrival at the foot of the mountain, had cut off their passage, and obliged them to return by the back of Etna, upwards of a hundred miles about. His authority for this, he tells me, was taken from inscriptions on Roman monuments found on this lava, and that it was likewise well ascertained by many of the old Sicilian authors. Now as this is abont two thousand years ago, one would imagine, if *lavas* have a regular progress in becoming fertile fields, that this must long ago have become at least arable: this, however, is not the case; and it is, as yet, only covered with a very scanty vegetation, and incapable of producing either corn or vines. There are indeed pretty large trees growing in the

covered the country, at least as high up as Williamsburg.

Again, in digging several wells lately in this town, the teeth of sharks were

crevices, which are full of a rich earth; but, in all probability, it will be some hundred years yet before there is enough of it to render this land of any use to the proprietors.

"It is curious to consider, that the surface of this black and barren matter, in process of time, becomes one of the most fertile soils upon earth: but what must be the time to bring it to its utmost perfection, when, after two thousand years, it is still, in most places, but a barren rock!" Vol. I. Letter VI.

"Signor Recupero, who obligingly engages to be our cicerone, has shown us some curious remains of antiquity; but they have been all so shaken and shattered by the mountain, that hardly any thing is to be found entire.

"Near to a vault, which is now thirty feet below ground, and has, probably, been a burial place, there is a draw-well, where there are several strata of *lavas, with earth to a considerable thickness over the surface of each stratum.* Recupero has made use of this as an argument to prove the great antiquity of the mountain. For if it require two thousand years or upwards, to form but a scanty soil on the

found from sixty to ninety or an hundred feet below the surface of the earth. The probability is that these teeth were deposited by the shark itself; and as this fish is never known to infest very shallow streams, the conclusion is clear that this whole country has once been buried under several fathoms of water. At all events, these teeth must be considered as ascertaining what was once the surface of the earth here; which surface is very little higher than that of James river. Now if

surface of a *lava*, there must have been more than that space of time betwixt each of the eruptions which have formed these strata. But what shall we say of a pit they sunk near to *Jaci* of a great depth? They pierced through *seven* distinct *lavas*, one under the other, the surfaces of which were parallel, and *most of them covered with a thick bed of rich earth*. Now," says he, "the eruption which formed the lowest of these *lavas*, if we may be allowed to reason from analogy, must have flowed from the mountain at least fourteen thousand years ago!" (Vol. I. Letter VII.) Whereas the computation inferred, but without doubt inaccurately, from the Pentateuch, makes the earth itself only between five and six thousand years old.

it be considered that there has been no perceptible difference wrought in the figure or elevation of the coast, nor, consequently, in the precipitation of the interior streams since the earliest recorded discovery of Virginia, which was two hundred years ago, it will follow, that James river must, for many hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, have been running, at least here, with a very rapid headlong current; the friction whereof must certainly have rendered the channel much deeper than it was at the time of the deposition of these teeth. The result is clear, that the surface of the stream, which even now, after all this friction and consequent depression, is so nearly on a level with the site of the shark's teeth, must originally have been much higher. I take this to be an irrefragable proof, that the land here was then inundated; and as there is no ground between this and the Atlantic, higher than that on which Richmond is built, it seems to me indisputably certain, that the whole

of this beautiful country was once covered with a dreary waste of water *.

* An elegant and well informed writer on the theory of the earth, under the signature of "An Inquirer," whose remarks were suggested by the perusal of this letter of the British Spy, observes that sea shells and other marine substances are found in every explored part of the world, "on the loftiest mountains of Europe, and the still loftier Andes of South America." As the British Spy was not writing a regular and elaborate treatise on the origin of the earth, he did not deem it material to congregate all the facts which have been seen, and supposed, in relation to this subject.

Whether the British Spy is to be considered as an Englishman of rank on a tour through America, and writing the above letter in Richmond to his friend in London; or whether he is to be considered as one of our own citizens, disposed to entertain the people of Richmond and its vicinity with a light and amusing speculation on the origin of their country, in either instance it was both more natural and more interesting that the speculation should appear to have grown out of recent facts discovered in their own town or neighbourhood, and with which they are all supposed to be conversant, than on distant and controvertible facts, which it was not important to the inquiry, whether they knew or believed, or not.

To what curious and interesting reflections does this subject lead us! Over this hill on which I am now sitting and writing at my ease, and from which I look with delight on the landscape that smiles around me—over this hill, and over this landscape, the billows of the ocean have rolled in wild and dreadful fury, while the leviathan, the whale, and all the monsters of the deep, have disported themselves amid the fearful tempest.

Where was then the shore of the ocean? From this place, for eighty miles to the westward, the ascent of the country is very gradual, and even up to the Blue Ridge marine shells and other phenomena are found, which demonstrate that *that* country too has been visited by the ocean. How then has it emerged? Has it been by a sudden convulsion? Certainly not. No observing man, who has ever travelled from the Blue Ridge to the Atlantic, can doubt that this emersion has been effected

by very slow gradations. For as you advance to the east, the proofs of the former submersion of the country thicken upon you. On the shores of York river the bones of whales abound; and I have been not a little amused in walking on the sand beach of that river during the recess of the tide, and looking up at the high cliff or bank above me, to observe strata of sea shells not yet calcined, like those which lay on the beach under my feet, interspersed with strata of earth, (the joint result no doubt of sand and putrid vegetables) exhibiting at once a sample of the manner in which the adjacent soil had been formed, and proof of the comparatively recent desertion of the waters.

Upon the whole, every thing here tends to confirm the ingenious theory of Mr. Buffon: that the eastern coasts of continents are enlarged by the perpetual revolution of the earth from west to east, which has the obvious tendency to conglomerate

the loose sands of the sea on the eastern coast; while the tides of the ocean, drawn from east to west, against the revolving earth, contribute to aid the process, and hasten the alluvion. But admitting the Abbé Raynal's idea, that America is a far younger country than either of the other continents, or, in other words, that America has emerged long since their formation, how did it happen that the materials, which compose this continent, were not accumulated on the eastern coast of Asia? Was it, that the present mountains of America, then protuberances on the bed of the ocean, intercepted a part of the passing sands which would otherwise have been washed on the Asiatic shore, and thus became the rudiments of this vast continent? If so, America is under much greater obligations to her barren mountains than she has hitherto supposed.

But while Mr. Buffon's theory accounts very handsomely for the enlargement of

the eastern coast, it offers no kind of reason for any extension of the western; on the contrary, the very causes assigned, to supply the addition to the eastern, seem at first view to threaten a diminution of the western coast. Accordingly, Mr. Buffon, we see, has adopted also the latter idea; and, in the constant alluvion from the western coast of one continent, has found a perennial source of materials for the eastern coast of that which lies behind it. This last idea, however, by no means quadrates with the hypothesis, that the mountains of America formed the original stamina of the continent; for, on the latter supposition, the mountains themselves would constitute the western coast; since Mr. Buffon's theory precludes the idea of any accession in that quarter. But the mountains do not constitute the western coast. On the contrary, there is a wider extent of country between the great mountains in North America, and the Pacific or the northern oceans, than there is be-

tween the same mountains and the Atlantic ocean. Mr. Buffon's theory therefore, however rational as to the eastern, becomes defective, as he presses it, in relation to the western coast; unless, to accommodate the theory, we suppose the total abrasion of some great mountain which originally constituted the western limit, and which was itself the embryon of this continent. But for many reasons, and particularly the present contiguity to Asia, at one part, where such a mountain, according to the hypothesis, must have run, the idea of any such limit will be thought rather too extravagant for adoption. The fact is, that Mr. Buffon has considered his theory rather in its operation on a continent already established, than on the birth or primitive emersion of a continent from the ocean.

As to the western part of this continent, I mean that which lies beyond the Allegany mountains, if it were not origi-

nally gained from the ocean, it has received an accumulation of earth by no means less wonderful. Far beyond the Ohio, in piercing the earth for water, the stumps of trees, bearing the most evident impressions of the ax, and on one of them the rust of consumed iron, have been discovered between ninety and a hundred feet below the present surface of the earth. This is a proof, by the by, not only that this immense depth of soil has been accumulated in that quarter, but that *that new country*, as the inhabitants of the Atlantic states call it, is, indeed, a very ancient one; and that North America has undergone more revolutions, in point of civilization, than have heretofore been thought of, either by the European or American philosophers. That part of this continent which borders on the western ocean being almost entirely unknown, it is impossible to say whether it exhibit the same evidence of emersion which is found here. M'Kenzie, however, the only

traveller who has ever penetrated through this vast forest, records a curious tradition among some of the western tribes of Indians: to wit, that the world was once covered with water. The tradition is embellished, as usual, with a number of very highly poetical fictions. The fact which I suppose to be couched under it, is the ancient submersion of that part of the continent, which certainly looks much more like *a world* than the petty territory that was inundated by Deucalion's flood. If I remember aright, for I cannot immediately refer to the book, Stith, in his history of Virginia, has recorded a similar tradition among the Atlantic tribes of Indians. I have no doubt that if M'Kenzie had been as well qualified for scientific research, as he was undoubtedly honest, firm, and persevering, it would have been in his power to have thrown great lights on this subject as it relates to the western country.

For my own part, while I believe the present mountains of America to have constituted the original *stamina* of the continent, I believe, at the same time, the western as well as the eastern country to be the effect of alluvion; produced too by the same causes: the rotation of the earth, and the planetary attraction of the ocean.

The perception of this will be easy and simple, if, instead of confounding the mind by a wide view of the whole continent as it now stands, we carry back our imaginations to the time of its birth, and suppose some one of the highest pinnacles of the Blue Ridge to have just emerged above the surface of the sea. Now whether the rolling of the earth to the east give to the ocean, which floats loosely upon its bosom, an actual counter-current to the west*, which is occasionally fur-

* This idea, which is merely stated *hypothetically*, is considered, by the Inquirer, as having been

ther accelerated by the motion of the tides in that direction, or whether this be

a position *absolutely* taken by the British Spy; and as the reverse principle, (to wit, that the motion of the waters is taken from and corresponds with that of the solid earth) *is so well established*, he concludes that it must have been contested by the British Spy through mere inadvertence. But, for my part, I do not perceive how this hypothetical idea of the British Spy is, at all, in collision with the doctrine of the diurnal or annual revolution of the terraqueous globe.

The British Spy could not have been guilty of so great an absurdity as to intend that the waters of the ocean deserted their bed; and broke over the eastern coasts and lofty mountains of opposing continents, in order to maintain their actual counter-current to the west. It must have been clear to him, that the ocean, keeping its bed, must attend the motion of the earth, "not only on its axis, but in its orbit." But the question here is not as to the position of the whole ocean as it relates to the whole earth: the question is merely as to the locomotion of the particles of the ocean among themselves. For although the ocean, as well as the solid earth, must perform a complete revolution around their common axis once in twenty-four hours, it does not follow, as I take it, that the globules of the fluid ocean must, all this time, remain as fixed as the atoms of the solid earth: they certainly may, and certainly have,

not the case; still to our newly emerged pinnacle, which is whirled, by the earth's

from some cause or other, a subordinate motion among themselves, frequently adverse to the general motion of the globe: to wit, a current to the west. The atmosphere belongs as much to this globe as the waters of the ocean do: that is to say, it cannot any more than the ocean fly off and attach itself to any other planet. It feels, like the ocean, the gravitating power of the earth, and the attraction of the neighbouring planets. It is affected, no doubt, very sensibly (at least the lower region of it) by the earth's diurnal rotation, and, like the ocean, is compelled to attend her in her annual journey around the sun. But what of this? Does the atmosphere remain fixed in such a manner, as that the part of it which our antipodes are respiring at this moment, is to furnish our diet, our *pabulum vitæ*, twelve hours hence? Certainly not: the atoms which compose the atmosphere are, we know, in spite of the earth's diurnal and annual motion, agitated and impelled in every direction; and so also, we equally well know, are the waters of the ocean.

If the Inquirer, when he says that "the motion of the earth is communicated to every part of it, whether solid or fluid," intend that the motion of the loose and fluid particles of the ocean take, from the earth, a flux among themselves to the east, the result would be an actual current to the east; which is not pretended. If he mean, that

motion, through the waters of the deep, the consequences will be the same as if

the globules of the ocean, unaffected by any other cause than the motion of the earth, would always maintain the same position in relation to each other, he may, indeed, allege a principle which is well established; but as it does not meet the approbation of my reason, and as I am not in the habit of reading merely that I may understand and believe, I must beg permission to enter my dissent to the principle. It would be difficult, if not impossible, so close as we are in the neighbourhood of the earth's attraction, to invent any apparatus by which a decisive experiment could be made on this subject. But, by the way of illustration, let us suppose the earth at rest; let us suppose the atmosphere, by the hand of the great chemist who raised it into its present aeriform state, once more reduced to a fluid; let us suppose it, like a great ocean, to surround the earth within the torrid zone, (partitioned at right angles by two or three mountains running from north to south) and all its parts reposing in a halcyon calm; let us then suppose the earth whirled on its axis to the east; what would be the probable effect? It is clear that the lower region of this superincumbent ocean would be most strongly bound by the earth's attraction; it is equally clear that the stratum of globules, immediately in contact with the earth, would adhere more strongly thereto than to the fluid stratum which rested upon it; while this adhesion to the

there were this actual and strong current. For while the waters will be continually

surface of the earth would be assisted by the many rugged protuberances on that surface. Hence, at the first motion of the earth, the lowest part of this circumambient ocean, being most powerfully attracted and attached to the earth, would slide under the fluid mass above it, and thereby produce an inequality in the upper surface of the water itself; an elevation in the eastern, a concavity in the western side of each partition; while the waters, from their tendency to seek their level, would strive to restore the balance, by falling constantly from east to west.

Whether this effect would continue for ever, or how long it would continue in our oceans as they are at present arranged, it is not easy to solve. But that a current from the east to the west would be at first produced, is as evident as the light of heaven: if it be denied, I demand the solution of the following phenomenon:—If a plate be filled with oil or other fluid, and the plate be then drawn in any direction, how does it happen that the fluid will manifest a tendency to flow in the opposite direction; insomuch, that if the draught of the plate be sudden, the fluid, running rapidly over the adverse edge of the plate, shall discharge itself completely, leaving little behind but the inferior stratum? I take it, that the man who solves this phenomenon satisfactorily, will be compelled to resort to principles which, when applied to our

accumulated on the eastern coast of this pinnacle, it is obvious that on the western coast, (protected, as it would be, from the

oceans resting loosely as they do on the earth which rolls under them, would inevitably produce a western current; and this current once produced it will be difficult to say why and when it should cease. A current thus produced would be unequal, from the nature of its cause, at various depths: it would be subject to temporary affections and alterations near its surface, by the winds, the tides, and the diversified shapes of the coasts on which the ocean rolls. The general tendency, however, of the great mass of the waters would be to the west.

I see no sound reason in renouncing Mr. Buffon's theory, either on account of the eloquent and beautiful manner in which it is explained; nor because it has long had its just portion of admirers; nor because there are other more modern theories. While we are children, it may be well enough to lie passively on our backs, and permit others to prepare and feed us with the pap of science; but when our own judgments and understandings have gained their maturity, it behoves us, instead of being "a feather for every wind that blows," instead of floating impotently before the *capricious current* of fashion and opinion, to heave out all our anchors; to take a position from which nothing shall move us but reason and truth, not novelty and fashion. In the progress of science many

current by the newly risen earth) the waters will always be comparatively low and calm. The result is clear. The

principles, in my opinion, have been dropped to make way for others which are newer, but less true. And among them Mr. Buffon's theory of the earth. The effect of alluvion is so slow, that any one generation is almost unable to perceive the change wrought by it; hence many people, unable to sit down and reflect on the wonders which *time* can do, fly off with a kind of puerile impatience, and resort to any thing, even a *bouleversemente* of a whole continent, rather than to depend on so slow and imperceptible an operation as that of alluvion. This is not philosophical. Neither, on the other hand, would it be philosophical to reject a theory because it might be new, and unsupported by a name. On the contrary, the man who on any branch of philosophy starts a new hypothesis, which has even the guise of reason, confers a benefit on the world; for he enlarges the ground of thought, and although not immediately in the temple of truth himself, may have dropped a hint, an accidental clew, which may serve to lead others to the door of the temple. In this spirit, I not only excuse, but am grateful even for the wildest of Dr. Darwin's philosophical chimeras. In the same spirit, I offer, without the expectation of its final adoption, the idea suggested by this note as to the cause of a western current.

sands, borne along by the ocean's current over the northern and southern extremities of this pinnacle, will always have a tendency to settle in the calm behind it; and thus, by perpetual accumulations, form a western coast, more rapidly perhaps than an eastern one; as we may see in miniature, by the capes and shallows collected by the still water, on each side, at the mouths of creeks, or below rocks, in the rapids of a river.

After this new-born point of earth had gained some degree of elevation, it is probable that successive coasts of vegetation, according to Dr. Darwin's idea, springing up, then falling and dying on the earth, paid an annual tribute to the infant continent, while each rain, which fell upon it, bore down a part of its substance, and assisted perpetually in the enlargement of its area.

It is curious that the arrangement of the mountains both in North and South

America, as well as the shape of the two continents, combine to strengthen the preceding theory. For the mountains, as you will perceive on inspecting your maps, run in chains from north to south; thus opposing the widest possible barrier to the sands, as they roll from east to west. The shape of the continent is just that which would naturally be expected from such an origin: that is, they lie along, collaterally, with the mountains. As far north as the country is well known, these ranges of mountains are observed; and it is remarkable, that as soon as the Cordilleras terminate in the south, the continent of South America ends; where they terminate in the north, the continent dwindles to a narrow isthmus.

Assuming this theory as correct, it is amusing to observe the conclusions to which it will lead us.

As the country is supposed to have been formed by gradual accumulations,

and as these accumulations were most probably equal, or nearly so, in every part, it follows that, broken as this country is in hills and dales, it has assumed no new appearance by its emersion; but that the figure of the earth's surface is the same throughout, as well where it is now covered by the waters of the ocean, as where it has been already denudated. So that Mr. Boyle's mountains in the sea cease to have any thing wonderful in them.

Connected with this, it is not an improbable conclusion, that new continents and islands are now forming on the bed of the ocean. Perhaps, at some future day, lands may emerge in the neighbourhood of the antarctic circle, which, by progressive accumulations and a consequent increase of weight, may keep a juster balance between the poles, and produce a material difference in our astronomical relations. The navigators of that day will be as successful in their discoveries in the southern seas, as Columbus was heretofore

in the northern. For there can be little doubt that there has been a time when Columbus, if he had lived, would have found his reasonings, on the balance of the earth, fallacious, and would have sought these seas for a continent, as much in vain, as Drake, Anson, Cooke, and others, encouraged perhaps by similar reasoning, have since sought the ocean of the south.

If Mr. Buffon's notion be correct, that the eastern coast of one continent is perpetually feeding on the western coast of that which lies before it, the conclusion is inevitable, that the present materials of Europe and Africa, and Asia in succession, will, at some future day, compose the continents of North and South America; while the latter, thrown on the Asiatic shore, will again make a part, and, in time, the whole of that continent, to which, by some philosophers, they are supposed to have been originally attached. It is equally clear that, by this means, the

continents will not only exchange their materials, but their position; so that, in process of time, they must respectively make a tour around the globe, maintaining still the same ceremonious distance from each other which they now hold.

According to my theory, which supposes an alluvion on the western as well as the eastern coasts, the continents and islands of the earth will be caused, reciprocally, to approximate, and (if materials enough can be found in the bed of the ocean, or generated by any process of nature) ultimately to unite. Our island of Great Britain, therefore, at some future day, and in proper person, will probably invade the territory of France. In the course of this work of alluvion, as it relates to this country, the refluent waters of the Atlantic will be forced to recede from Hampton Roads and the Chesapeak; the beds whereof will become fertile valleys, or, as they are called here, river bottoms;

while the lands in the lower district of the state, which are now only a very few feet above the surface of the sea, will rise into majestic eminences, and the present sickly site of Norfolk be converted into a high and salubrious mountain. I apprehend, however, that the present inhabitants of Norfolk would be extremely unwilling to have such an effect wrought in their day; since there can be little doubt that they prefer their present commercial situation, encumbered as it is by the annual visits of the yellow fever, to the elevation and health of the Blue Ridge.

In the course of this process, too, of which I have been speaking, if the theory be correct, the gulf of Mexico will be eventually filled up, and the West India islands consolidated with the American continent.

These consequences, visionary as they may now appear, are not only probable;

but, if the alluvion which is demonstrated to have taken place already should continue, they are inevitable. There is very little probability that the isthmus of Darien, which connects the two continents, is coeval with the Blue Ridge or the Cordilleras; and it requires only a continuation of the cause, which produced the isthmus, to effect the repletion of the gulf, and the consolidation of the islands with the continent.

But when? I am possessed of no *data* whereby the calculations can be made. The depth at which *Herculaneum* and *Pompeia* were found to be buried in the course of sixteen hundred years affords us no light on this inquiry; because their burial was effected not by the slow alluvion and accumulation of time, but by the sudden and repeated eruptions of Vesuvius. As little are we aided by the repletion of the earth around the *Tarpeian* rock in *Rome;* since that repletion was

most probably effected, in a very great degree, by the materials of fallen buildings. And besides, the original height of the rock is not ascertained with any kind of precision: historians having, I believe, merely informed us, that it was sufficiently elevated to kill the criminals who were thrown from its summit.

But a truce with philosophy. Who could have believed that the skeleton of an unwieldy whale, and a few mouldering teeth of a shark, would have led me such a dance!

Adieu, my dear S......., for the present: may the light of heaven continue to shine around you!

LETTER III.

Richmond, September 15.

You inquire into the state of your favourite art in Virginia. Eloquence, my dear S......., has few successful votaries here: I mean eloquence of the highest order; such as that to which, not only the bosom of your friend, but the feelings of the whole British nation, bore evidence, in listening to the charge of the Begums in the prosecution of Warren Hastings.

In the national and state legislatures, as well as at the various bars in the United States, I have heard great volubility, much good sense, and some random touches of the pathetic: but in the same bodies, I have heard a far greater proportion of puerile rant, or tedious and disgusting

inanity. Three remarks are true as to almost all their orators.

First: they have not a sufficient fund of general knowledge.

Secondly: they have not the habit of close and solid thinking.

Thirdly: they do not aspire at original ornaments.

From these three defects it most generally results, that although they pour out, easily enough, a torrent of words, yet these are destitute of the light of erudition, the practical utility of just and copious thought, or those novel and beautiful allusions and embellishments, with which the very scenery of the country is so highly calculated to inspire them.

The truth is, my dear S......., that this scarcity of genuine and sublime elo-

quence, is not confined to the United States: instances of it in any civilized country have always been rare indeed. Mr. Blair is certainly correct in the opinion, that a state of nature is most favourable to the higher efforts of the imagination, and the more unrestrained and noble raptures of the heart. Civilization, wherever it has gained ground, has interwoven with society a habit of artificial and elaborate decorum, which mixes in every operation of life, deters the fancy from every bold enterprise, and buries nature under a load of hypocritical ceremonies. A man, therefore, in order to be eloquent, has to forget the habits in which he has been educated; and never will he touch his audience so exquisitely as when he goes back to the primitive simplicity of the patriarchal age.

I have said that instances of genuine and sublime eloquence have always been rare in every civilized country. It is true

that Tully and Pliny the younger have, in their epistles, represented Rome, in their respective days, as swarming with orators of the first class: yet, from the specimens which they themselves have left us, I am led to entertain a very humble opinion of ancient eloquence.

Demosthenes we know has pronounced, not the chief, but the sole merit of an orator to consist in *delivery*, or, as Lord Verulam translates it, in *action;* and, although I know that the world would proscribe it as a literary heresy, I cannot help believing Tully's merit to have been principally of that kind. For my own part, I confess very frankly, that I have never met with any thing of his which has, according to my taste, deserved the name of superior eloquence. His style, indeed, is pure, polished, sparkling, full and sonorous; and perhaps deserves all the encomiums which have been bestowed on it. But an oration, certainly, no more

deserves the title of superior eloquence, because its style is ornamented, than the figure of an Apollo would deserve the epithet of elegant, merely from the superior texture and flow of the drapery. In reading an oration, it is the mind to which I look. It is the expanse and richness of the conception itself which I regard, and not the glittering tinsel wherein it may be attired. Tully's orations, examined in this spirit, have, with me, sunk far below the grade at which we have been taught to fix them.

It is true, that at school, I learned, like the rest of the world, to lisp "Cicero the orator:" but when I grew up and began to judge for myself, I opened his volumes again, and looked in vain for that sublimity of conception which fills and astonishes the mind; that simple pathos which finds such a sweet welcome in every breast; or that resistless enthusiasm of unaffected passion which takes the heart

by storm. On the contrary, let me confess to you, that, whatever may be the cause, to me he seemed cold and vapid, and uninteresting and tiresome: not only destitute of that compulsive energy of thought which we look for in a great man, but even void of the strong, rich, and varied colouring of a superior fancy. His masterpiece of composition, his work De Oratore, is, in my judgment, extremely light and unsubstantial; and in truth is little more than a tissue of rhapsodies, assailing the ear indeed with pleasant sounds, but leaving few clear and useful traces on the mind. Plutarch speaks of his person as all grace, his voice as perfect music, his look and gesture as all alive, striking, dignified, and peculiarly impressive; and I incline to the opinion, that to these theatrical advantages, connected with the just reliance which the Romans had in his patriotism and good judgment, their strong interest in the subjects discussed by him, and their more intimate acquaint-

ance with the idiom of his language, his fame, while living arose; and that it has been, since, propagated by the schools on account of the classic purity and elegance of his style.

Many of these remarks are, in my opinion, equally applicable to Demosthenes. He deserves, indeed, the distinction of having more fire and less smoke than Tully. But, in the majestic march of the mind, in force of thought, and splendor of imagery, I think both the orators of Greece and Rome eclipsed by more than one person within his majesty's dominions.

Heavens! How should I be anathematized and excommunicated by every pedagogue in Great Britain, if these remarks were made public! Spirits of Car and of Ascham! have mercy upon me! Woe betide the hand that plucks the wizard beard of hoary error! From lisping infancy to stooping age, the reproaches, the curses of

the world shall be upon it!—But to you, my dearest S……., my friend, my preceptor, to you I disclose my opinions with the same freedom, and for the same purpose, that I would expose my wounds to a surgeon. To you, it is peculiarly proper that I should make my appeal on this subject; for when eloquence is the theme, your name is not far off.

Tell me, then, you who are capable of doing it, what is this divine eloquence? What the charm by which the orator binds the senses of his audience; by which he attunes and touches and sweeps the human lyre, with the resistless sway and master-hand of a Timotheus? Is not the whole mystery comprehended in one word —SYMPATHY? I mean not merely that tender passion which quavers the lip and fills the eye of the babe when he looks on the sorrows and tears of another; but that still more delicate and subtile quality, by which we passively catch the very colours,

momentum, and strength of the mind, to whose operations we are attending; which converts every speaker to whom we listen into a *Procrustes*, and enables him, for the moment, to stretch or lop our faculties to fit the standard of his own mind.

This is a very curious subject. I am sometimes half inclined to adopt the notion stated by our great Bacon in his original and masterly treatise on the advancement of learning. "Fascination," says he, "is the power and act of imagination intensive upon other bodies than the body of the imaginant; wherein the school of Paracelsus and the disciples of pretended natural magic have been so intemperate, as that they have exalted the power of the imagination to be much one with the power of miracle-working faith: others that draw nearer to probability, calling to their view the secret passages of things, and especially of the contagion that passeth from body to body, do conceive it should likewise be agreeable

to nature, *that there should be some transmissions and operations from spirit to spirit, without the mediation of the senses:* whence the conceits have grown, now almost made civil, of the mastering spirit, and the force of confidence, and the like." This notion is further explained in his Sylva Sylvarum, wherein he tells a story of an Egyptian soothsayer, who made Mark Antony believe, that his genius, which was otherwise brave and confident, was, in the presence of Octavianus Cæsar, poor and cowardly: and therefore he advised him to absent himself as much as he could and remove far from him. It turned out, however, that this soothsayer was suborned by Cleopatra, who wished Antony's company in Egypt.

Yet if there be not something of this secret intercourse from spirit to spirit, how does it happen that one speaker shall gradually invade and benumb all the faculties of my

soul as if I were handling a torpedo; while another shall awaken and arouze me, like the clangor of the martial trumpet? How does it happen that the first shall infuse his poor spirit into my system, lethargize my native intellects, and bring down my powers exactly to the level of his own? or that the last shall descend upon me like an angel of light, breathe new energies into my frame, dilate my soul with his own intelligence, exalt me into a new and nobler region of thought; snatch me from the earth at pleasure, and wrap me to the seventh heaven? And, what is still more wonderful, how does it happen that these different effects endure so long after the agency of the speaker has ceased; insomuch, that if I sit down to any intellectual exercise, after listening to the first speaker, my performance shall be unworthy even of me, and the numb-fish visible and tangible in every sentence? whereas, if I enter on the same amuse-

ment, after having attended to the last-mentioned orator, I shall be astonished at the elevation and vigour of my own thoughts; and if I meet, accidentally, with the same production, a month or two afterwards, when my mind has lost the inspiration, shall scarcely recognise it for my own work!

Whence is all this? To me it would seem that it must proceed either from the subtile commerce between the spirits of men, which Lord Verulam notices, and which enables the speaker, thereby, to identify his hearer with himself; or else that the mind of man possesses, independently of any volition on the part of its proprietor, a species of pupillary faculty of dilating and contracting itself, in proportion to the pencil of the rays of light which the speaker throws upon it; which dilatation or contraction, as in the case of the eye, cannot be immediately and abruptly altered.

Whatever may be the solution, the fact, I think, is certainly as I have stated it: and it is remarkable that the same effect is produced, though perhaps in a less degree, by perusing books into which different degrees of spirit and genius have been infused. I am acquainted with a gentleman who never sits down to a composition, wherein he wishes to shine, without previously reading, with intense application, half a dozen pages of his favourite Bolingbroke. Having taken the character and impulse of that writer's mind, he declares that he feels his pen to flow with a spirit not his own; and that, if in the course of his work, his powers begin to languish, he finds it easy to revive and charge them afresh from the same never-failing source.

If these things be not visionary, it becomes important to a man, for a new reason, what books he reads, and what company he keeps; since, according to Lord Verulam's notion, an influx of the

spirits of others may change the native character of his heart and understanding before he is aware of it; or, according to the other suggestion, he may so habitually contract the pupil of his mind as to be disqualified for the comprehension of a great subject, and fit only for microscopic observations. Whereas by keeping the company, and reading the works of men of magnanimity and genius only, he may receive their qualities by subtile transmission, and, eventually, get the eye, the ardour, and the enterprise of an eagle.

But whither am I wandering? Permit me to return. Admitting the correctness of the principles formerly mentioned, it would seem to be a fair conclusion, that whenever an orator wishes to know what effect he has wrought on his audience, he should coolly and conscientiously propound to himself this question: Have I myself, throughout my oration, felt those clear and cogent convictions of judgment, and that

pure and exalted fire of the soul, with which I wished to inspire others? For, he may rely on it, that he can no more impart (or to use Bacon's word, transmit) convictions and sensations which he himself has not, at the time, sincerely felt, than he can convey a clear title to property in which he himself has no title.

This leads me to remark a defect which I have noticed more than once in this country. Following up too closely the cold conceit of the Roman division of an oration, the speakers set aside a particular part of their discourse, usually the peroration, in which they take it into their heads that they will be pathetic. Accordingly, when they reach this part, whether it be prompted by the feelings or not, a mighty bustle commences. The speaker pricks up his ears, erects his chest, tosses his arms with hysterical vehemence, and says every thing which he supposes ought to affect his hearers; but it is all in vain:

for it is obvious that every thing he says is prompted by the head; and, however it may display his ingenuity and fertility, however it may appeal to the admiration of his hearers, it will never strike deeper. The *hearts* of the audience will refuse all commerce except with the *heart* of the speaker; nor, in this commerce is it possible by any disguise, however artful, to impose false ware on them. However the speaker may labour to seem to feel, however near he may approach to the appearance of the reality, the heart nevertheless possesses a keen unerring sense, which never fails to detect the imposture. It would seem as if the heart of man stamps a secret mark on all its effusions, which alone can give them currency, and which no ingenuity, however adroit, can successfully counterfeit.

I have been not a little diverted here in listening to some fine orators, who deal

almost entirely in this pathos of the head. They practise the start, the pause—make an immense parade of attitudes and gestures, and seem to imagine themselves piercing the heart with a thousand wounds: the heart all the time developing every trick that is played to cajole her, and, sitting serene and composed, looks on and smiles at the ridiculous pageant as it passes!

Nothing can, in my opinion, be more ill-judged in an orator, than to indulge himself in this idle artificial parade. It is particularly unfortunate in an exordium. It is as much as to say *caveat auditor;* and for my own part, the moment I see an orator rise with this menacing majesty; assume a look of solemn wisdom; stretch forth his right arm, like the *rubens dexter* of Jove; and hear him open his throat in deep and tragic tone; I feel myself involuntarily braced and in an attitude of de-

fence, as if I were going to take a bout with Mendoza.

The Virginians boast of an orator of nature, whose manner was the reverse of all this; and he is the only orator of whom they do boast with much emphasis. I mean the celebrated Patrick Henry, whom I regret that I came to this country too late to see. I cannot, indeed, easily forgive him, even in the grave, his personal instrumentality in separating these fair colonies from Great Britain; yet I dare not withhold from the memory of his talents the tribute of respect to which they are so justly entitled.

I am told that his general appearance and manners were those of a plain farmer or planter of the back country; that in this character he always entered on the exordium of an oration: disqualifying himself with looks and expressions of humility

so lowly and unassuming, as threw every heart off its guard, and induced his audience to listen to him with the same easy openness with which they would converse with an honest neighbour: but, by-and-by, when it was little expected, he would take a flight so high, and blaze with a splendor so heavenly, as filled them with a kind of religious awe, and gave him the force and authority of a prophet.

You remember this was the manner of Ulysses: commencing with the look depressed, and hesitating voice. Yet I dare say Mr. Henry was directed to it, not by the example of Ulysses, of which it is very probable, that, at the commencement of his career, at least, he was entirely ignorant: but either that it was the genuine, trembling diffidence, without which, if Tully may be believed, a great orator never rises: or else that he was prompted to it by his own sound judgment, and

his intimate knowledge of the human heart.

I have seen the skeletons of some of his orations. The periods and their members are short, quick, eager, palpitating, and are manifestly the extemporaneous effusions of a mind deeply convinced, and a heart inflamed with zeal for the propagation of those convictions. They afford, however, a very inadequate sample of his talents: the stenographer having never attempted to follow him, when he arose in the strength and awful majesty of his genius.

I am not a little surprised to find eloquence of this high order so negligently cultivated in the United States. Considering what a very powerful engine it is in a republic, and how peculiarly favourable to its culture the climate of republics has been always found, I expected to have seen in America more votaries to Mercury

than even to Plutus. Indeed it would be so sure a road both to wealth and honours, that if I coveted either, and were an American, I would bend all my powers to its acquirement, and try whether I could not succeed as well as Demosthenes in vanquishing natural imperfections. Ah! my dear S......., were you a citizen of this country! You, under the influence of whose voice a parliament of Great Britain has trembled and shuddered, while her refined and enlightened galleries have wept and fainted in the excess of feeling!—what might you not accomplish? But, for the honour of my country, I am much better pleased that you are a Briton.

On the subject of Virginian eloquence you shall hear further from me. In the meantime, adieu, my S......., my friend, my father!

TO THE EDITOR OF THE VIRGINIA ARGUS.

SIR,

As the theory of the earth derives importance from its dignity, if not from its utility, and has of late years given birth to many ingenious speculations, I shall offer no apology for troubling you with the following remarks, which were suggested by an essay in last Wenesday's Argus, entitled "The British Spy."

Sea shells and other marine productions, differing in no respect from those which now exist in their native element, have been found in every explored part of the globe. They are found, too, in the highest as well as in the lowest situations: on the loftiest mountains of Europe, and the still loftier Andes of South America. To go no further from home, our own

Allegany abounds with them. How were these substances separated from their parent ocean? Do they still remain in their primitive beds? and has the water deserted them, or have they deserted the water? These questions, differently answered, give rise to different theories.

Among these theories, that of the Count de Buffon stands conspicuous. Adorned with all the graces of style, and borrowing a lustre from his other splendid productions, it has long had its full share of admirers. After exhibiting new proofs of a former submersion, in which he discovers great ingenuity, and is certainly entitled to great praise, he proceeds to account for the earth in its present form, by a natural operation of the ocean which covered it. This hypothesis, which the British Spy has partially adopted, is liable to many objections, which, to me at least, are insuperable. I will briefly notice some of the most obvious.

Although alluvion may account for small accessions of soil nearly on a level with the ocean, it cannot explain the formation of mountains. It is contrary to all the known laws of nature to suppose that a fluid could lift, so far above its own level, bodies many times heavier than itself.

Again, if the ocean, as Buffon maintains, have a tendency to wear away all points and eminences over which it passes, it would exert this tendency on the mountains itself had formed; or rather, it would prevent their formation. It is surely inconsistent to suppose the ocean would produce mountains, and at the same time wear away those that already existed. Indeed, the author himself seemed to be aware of the invincible objections to this part of his theory, and endeavours to evade their force by sinking a part of the earth, in the cavity occasioned by which the superfluous waters find a sufficient recep-

tacle; thus abandoning the agency of alluvion, and adopting a new and totally different hypothesis.

But while marine substances are found far *above* their proper element, vegetable bodies are often found far *below* the seat of their production. In Europe they often meet with wood, at great depths of the earth, in a state of perfect preservation, and in sinking wells in this country, trunks of trees frequently obstruct the progress of the work. A Mr. Peters, of Harrison county, not long since met with pieces of pine twenty feet below the surface, on a hill of considerable elevation, and at a distance from any watercourse. In this town leaves, believed to be those of the hazle, were found mingled with marine productions. These vegetable matters must have been once exposed to air, heat, and light, to have attained the state in which they were found; and the same exposure would have afterwards caused their decay,

unless their interment had been sudden and complete. Bones, shells, and other extraneous substances, are often found bedded in marble and other hard bodies; and I myself have seen a specimen of those human bones, which in the fortifications of Gibraltar are often found incorporated with the solid rock. What less than some great throe of nature, or some mighty agent, now dormant and unknown, could have produced the general *bouleversement* which these appearances indicate?

But the hypothetical reasoning of Monsieur de Buffon is founded on a fact no less hypothetical. The arguments in favour of a general current to the west are, I confess, very cogent, and would be convincing but for the following difficulties:

1. If the operation of the sun and moon, in producing alternate elevations and depressions of the ocean, produce also a current, the force of this current will be

in proportion to the mass of water thus raised and depressed. Now, contrary to the assertion of Buffon, the tides are highest in high latitudes, and gradually diminish towards the equator, where I believe they hardly exceed a foot. By the observations of Captain Cook, the same difference exists in the Pacific ocean as was long known in the Atlantic. If, then, there be a general current to the west, it should be strongest in high latitudes, and weakest under the line. But the contrary is the fact. No general current to the west is found without the tropics; and that which prevails irregularly between them is usually and rationally ascribed to the trade winds.

2. If this supposed current existed, its effect would be readily perceived by our navigators in the difference of their passages to and from Europe; but, the one before referred to excepted, they meet with nothing of the kind. A current, at

the rate of one mile an hour, would make a difference of near two thousand miles between an ordinary voyage to and from Europe.

3. By actual observations, detailed in the second volume of the Philosophical Transactions, the prevailing currents about some islands in the Atlantic Ocean are to the east. At Owhyhee, which lies within the tropics, and nearly in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, Captain Cook observed the current to set, without any regularity, sometimes to the west, and sometimes to the east.

4. But one argument may be deemed conclusive. The air is a fluid at least as sensible to the gravitating power of the planets as the ocean, and, like that, must also have its tides. If, on the one hand, the tides of the air are more liable to be disturbed by its compressibility, by partial

rarefaction or condensation, its obstacles, on the other hand, to a free motion round the earth are comparatively inconsiderable. Its course is somewhat impeded, but never arrested. If then such a general law existed, as is contended for, there would be either a steady east wind, or greater flow of air, from that quarter than from the west in every climate of the globe. But this is the case only between the tropics; and the prevalence of the east wind in that region has been almost universally ascribed to rarefaction by heat; since no other solution can account for the sea and land breezes, monsoons, and other phenomena of those climates.

From these considerations, I am disposed to think that there is no uniform current to the west, or that it is too inconsiderable to have any effect on the figure of the earth. Admitting the existence of a general current, it may be merely su-

perficial. Currents, whose force gradually diminishes from the surface downwards, are known to exist; and the practice of seamen, when they wish "to try the current," is evidently founded on the belief that they do not extend to great depths. The accession of water by the tides is too small to require a general movement of the ocean to its bottom.

In weighing the probability of a general current to the west, I have confined myself to the operation of the tides; as the mere motion of the earth, either in its orbit or on its axis, can have no possible effect this way. This motion is communicated to every part of the earth, whether solid or fluid; and while it continues equable they are both affected alike, and their relative situations remain the same. So well established a principle must have been contested by the British Spy through mere inadvertence.

If, after all that has been said, arguments in favour of a current from the surface to the bottom be deemed conclusive, it is worth while to inquire into its probable effects.

The British Spy supposes that this general current enlarges both the eastern and western coasts of continents; in which hypothesis he differs less from Buffon than that elegant but fanciful theorist differs from himself: for, in his theory on the formation of the planets, he advances that the ocean is continually wearing away the eastern coasts, and by a process, which he does not even hint at, enlarging the western; and that Asia is an older country than Europe. But in a subsequent work, his Epochs, he maintains the direct reverse, and mentions the abruptness of the western, and the greater number of islands of the eastern coasts, as evidences that the former have been abraded by the ocean.

But I find neither reasoning nor fact to warrant either of these conclusions. It has been observed that a shore forms a convex outline where it gains on the ocean, and a concave where it loses. On inspecting the map of the world, we perceive nothing which by this standard indicates a greater increase on one continent than on the other, or even any increase at all. We see no vast prominence of coast under the line; but on taking both shores of the ocean, *in both hemispheres*, into comparison, we find that the convexities on the western side are balanced by equal convexities on the eastern. Besides, it is clear that in proportion as the contents of the ocean are cast on the land, in the same degree it becomes deeper, and its shores more steep and abrupt. This is as true of the ocean as it is of a ditch. By this increasing declivity of growing shores, the additional gravity to be overcome will, in time, check the alluvion of any current, however strong. An opposite equalizing

tendency occurs, where the coast is worn away by the ocean. Successive fragments of rocks and precipices, by sloping the shore, gradually abate the impetus of the waters, until the coast attains that due inclination by which the gravity to be overcome exactly counterbalances the projectile force of the ocean. Without doubt small variations continually take place in the outline of all coasts; but the equilibrium for which I contend is founded on correct principles; and every coast, whether eastern or western, approaches to that form, if it have not already attained it, when what it loses *by the ocean* will be precisely equal to what it gains.

It should be remarked that Buffon, in his last addition to his *Theorie*, conscious of the insufficiency of alluvion in the formation of continents, supposes that the cavities with which the earth abounds are continually falling in, and, from the consequent retreat of the ocean, that conti-

nents are continually approximating. This conjecture certainly renders his theory more consistent; but it substitutes a cause for the emersion of the earth totally different from his first hypothesis of alluvion; and it has been that alone which I have considered. This last supposition is merely gratuitous, as neither observation nor history afford us any proofs of the existence of these immense caverns, or of any general retreat of the ocean.

For the reasons which I have given, and for many more, the theory of this celebrated naturalist has long been deemed both improbable and inadequate, and is now confined to the merit, (no small merit by the by) of having collected valuable materials, and detected the fallacies of Burnet, Woodward, and other dreamers on the subject. It has accordingly given place to new theories, more consistent at least, if not more satisfactory. Volcanoes,

an intense heat in the centre of the earth, the recrements of animals and vegetables, have been employed, as separate or joint agents, by the speculators on this curious subject. Dr. Hutton, by far the most celebrated of these, supposes the exuviæ of shellfish to have constituted the basis of the earth; and that it has assumed its present form and appearance by the fusion produced by the earth's internal heat. He supports this opinion by a train of elaborate reasoning, and a chemical examination of the bodies which compose the outer crust of the earth. I regret that I am acquainted with the work only at second hand. But I believe that even this theory, ingenious and scientific as it is, gives little more general satisfaction than those which preceded it. It is, in common with the other late hypotheses, opposed by the fine reasoning of Buffon, in favour of the immediate action of water in producing the correspondent angles of mountains,

their waving outline, parallel strata, &c., as well as by many of the facts I have glanced at; and it is moreover said to be contradicted by some chemical experiments, at once pertinent and clear.

On the whole, then, I fear we have not yet arrived at that certainty which will satisfy the inquirer who is neither enamoured with the fancies of his own brain nor seduced by the eloquence of others; and therefore, to use the words of an elegant writer of our own country, who discovers the same acuteness, the same philosophic caution on this as on other occasions, "we must be contented to acknowledge that this great phenomenon is, as yet, unsolved. Ignorance is preferable to error; and he is less remote from the truth who believes nothing than he who believes what is wrong."

Before we can obtain a sober conviction on the subject, or even properly compare

the probability of the respective theories, many questions now contested must be settled, new facts must be discovered, new powers of nature developed.

How far does the power of aqueous solution and of crystallization extend? Does the earth borrow all its heat from the sun; or has it a perennial source in its own bowels? Are there general currents in the ocean? If so, what are their courses, periods, and strength? It is clear that every rain that falls, every wind that blows, transports some portion of the earth we inhabit to the ocean. Is there any secret and magical process in nature, as some have supposed, by which this perpetual waste is perpetually repaired? and do mountains receive accessions by rain, by attraction, or any other mode equal to what they evidently lose? Again, water is converted into vegetables, vegetables into animals, and both of these again into earth. Is this same earth reconverted into

water, and by one unvaried round of mutation, each preserved in its present proportion to all eternity?

Science, with an ardour of inquiry never before known, and a daily increase of materials, advances with hasty steps to answer these preliminary questions; but till they are solved, I incline to think that every theory is premature, and shall, therefore, remain satisfied with the safe but humble character of,

AN INQUIRER.

LETTER IV.

Richmond, September 22.

I HAVE just returned, my dear S……., from an interesting morning's ride. My object was to visit the site of the Indian town Powhatan; which you will remember was the metropolis of the dominions of Pocahuntas' father, and very probably the birth-place of that celebrated princess.

The town was built on the river, about two miles below the ground now occupied by Richmond; that is, about two miles below the head of tide water. The land whereon it stood is, at present, part of a very beautiful and valuable farm belonging to a gentleman of the name of William Mayo.

Aware of the slight manner in which the Indians have always constructed their habitations, I was not at all disappointed in finding no vestige of the old town. But as I traversed the ground over which Pocahuntas had so often bounded and frolicked in the sprightly morning of her youth, I could not help recalling the principal features of her history, and heaving a sigh of mingled pity and veneration to her memory.

Good heaven! what an eventful life was hers! To speak of nothing else, the arrival of the English in her father's dominions must have appeared (as indeed it turned out to be) a most portentous phenomenon. It is not easy for us to conceive the amazement and consternation which must have filled her mind, and that of her nation, at the first appearance of our countrymen. Their great ship, with all her sails spread, advancing in solemn majesty to the shore; their complexion;

their dress; their language; their domestic animals; their cargo of new and glittering wealth; and then the thunder and irresistible force of their artillery; the distant country announced by them, far beyond the great water, of which the oldest Indian had never heard, or thought, or dreamed —all this was so new, so wonderful, so tremendous, that I do seriously suppose, the personal descent of an army of Milton's celestial angels, robed in light, sporting in the bright beams of the sun and redoubling their splendor, making divine harmony with their golden harps, or playing with the bolt and chasing the rapid lightning of heaven, would excite not more astonishment in Great Britain than did the debarkation of the English among the aborigines of Virginia.

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Poor Indians! Where are they now? Indeed, my dear S......., this is a truly afflicting consideration. The people here may say what they please; but, on the

principles of eternal truth and justice, they have no right to this country. They say that they have bought it—bought it! Yes;—of whom?—Of the poor trembling natives who knew that refusal would be vain; and who strove to make a merit of necessity, by seeming to yield with grace what they knew that they had not the power to retain. Such a bargain might appease the conscience of a gentleman of the green bag, "worn and hackneyed" in the arts and frauds of his profession; but in heaven's chancery, my S……., there can be little doubt that it has been long since set aside on the ground of duress.

Poor wretches! No wonder that they are so implacably vindictive against the white people; no wonder that the rage of resentment is handed down from generation to generation; no wonder that they refuse to associate and mix permanently with their unjust and cruel invaders and

exterminaters; no wonder that in the unabating spite and frenzy of conscious impotence, they wage an eternal war, as well as they are able; that they triumph in the rare opportunity of revenge; that they dance, sing and rejoice, as the victim shrieks and faints amid the flames, when they imagine all the crimes of their oppressors collected on his head, and fancy the spirits of their injured forefathers hovering over the scene, smiling with ferocious delight at the grateful spectacle, and feasting on the precious odour as it arises from the burning blood of the white man.

Yet the people here affect to wonder that the Indians are so very unsusceptible of civilization; or, in other words, that they so obstinately refuse to adopt the manners of the white men. Go, Virginian; erase, from the Indian nation, the tradition of their wrongs; make them forget, if you can, that once this charming

country was theirs; that over these fields, and through these forests, their beloved forefathers once, in careless gaiety, pursued their sports and hunted their game; that every returning day found them the sole, the peaceful, the happy proprietors of this extensive and beautiful domain. Make them forget too, if you can, that in the midst of all this innocence, simplicity, and bliss—the white man came; and lo! —the animated chase, the feast, the dance, the song of fearless thoughtless joy were over; that ever since they have been made to drink of the bitter cup of humiliation; treated like dogs; their lives, their liberties, the sport of the white men; their country and the graves of their fathers torn from them, in cruel succession: until, driven from river to river, from forest to forest, and through a period of two hundred years, rolled back, nation upon nation, they find themselves fugitives, vagrants, and strangers in their own country, and look forward to the certain period

when their descendants will be totally extinguished by wars, driven at the point of the bayonet into the western ocean, or reduced to a fate still more deplorable and horrid, the condition of slaves. Go, administer the cup of oblivion to recollections and anticipations like these, and then you will cease to complain that the Indian refuses to be civilized. But until then, surely it is nothing wonderful that a nation, even yet bleeding afresh from the memory of ancient wrongs, perpetually agonized by new outrages, and goaded into desperation and madness at the prospect of the certain ruin which awaits their descendants, should hate the authors of their miseries, of their desolation, their destruction; should hate their manners, hate their colour, their language, their name, and every thing that belongs to them. No; never, until time shall wear out the history of their sorrows and their sufferings, will the Indian be brought to love the white man, and to imitate his manners.

Great God! To reflect, my S......., that the authors of all these wrongs were our own countrymen, our forefathers, professors of the meek and benevolent religion of Jesus! Oh! it was impious; it was unmanly; poor and pitiful! Gracious Heaven! what had these poor people done? The simple inhabitants of these peaceful plains, what wrong, what injury, had they offered to the English? My soul melts with pity and shame.

As for the present inhabitants, it must be granted that they are comparatively innocent: unless indeed they also have encroached under the guise of treaties, which they themselves have previously contrived to render expedient or necessary to the Indians.

Whether this have been the case or not, I am too much a stranger to the interior transactions of this country to decide. But it seems to me that were I a presi-

dent of the United States, I would glory in going to the Indians, throwing myself on my knees before them, and saying to them, " Indians, friends, brothers, oh! forgive my countrymen! Deeply have our forefathers wronged you; and they have forced us to continue the wrong. Reflect, brothers; it was not our fault that we were born in your country; but now we have no other home; we have no where else to rest our feet. Will you not then permit us to remain? Can you not forgive even us, innocent as we are? If you can, oh! come to our bosoms; be, indeed, our brothers; and since there is room enough for us all, give us a home in your land, and let us be children of the same affectionate family." I believe that a magnanimity of sentiment like this, followed up by a correspondent greatness of conduct on the part of the people of the United States, would go further to bury the tomahawk, and produce a fraternization with the Indians, than all the pre-

sents, treaties, and missionaries that can be employed; dashed and defeated as these latter means always are, by a claim of rights on the part of the white people which the Indians know to be false and baseless. Let me not be told that the Indians are too dark and fierce to be affected by generous and noble sentiments. I will not believe it. Magnanimity can never be lost on a nation which has produced an Alknomok, a Logan, and a Pocahuntas.

The repetition of the name of this amiable princess brings me back to the point from which I digressed. I wonder that the Virginians, fond as they are of anniversaries, have instituted no festival or order in honour of her memory. For my own part, I have little doubt, from the histories which we have of the first attempts at colonizing their country, that Pocahuntas deserves to be considered as the patron deity of the enterprise. When it

is remembered how long the colony struggled to get a footing; how often sickness or famine, neglect at home, mismanagement here, and the hostilities of the natives, brought it to the brink of ruin; through what a tedious lapse of time it alternately languished and revived, sunk and rose, sometimes hanging, like Addison's lamp, "quivering at a point," then suddenly shooting up into a sickly and short-lived flame; in one word, when we recollect how near and how often it verged towards total extinction, maugre the patronage of Pocahuntas, there is the strongest reason to believe that, but for her patronage, the anniversary cannon of the fourth of July would never have resounded throughout the United States.

Is it not probable, that this sensible and amiable woman, perceiving the superiority of the Europeans, foreseeing the probability of the subjugation of her countrymen, and anxious as well to soften their

destiny, as to save the needless effusion of human blood, desired, by her marriage with Mr. Rolfe, to hasten the abolition of all distinction between Indians and white men; to bind their interests and affections by the nearest and most endearing ties, and to make them regard themselves as one people, the children of the same great family? If such were her wise and benevolent views, and I have no doubt but they were, how poorly were they backed by the British court? No wonder at the resentment and indignation with which she saw them neglected; no wonder at the bitterness of the disappointment and vexation which she expressed to captain Smith, in London, arising as well from the cold reception which she herself had met, as from the contemptuous and insulting point of view in which she found that her nation was regarded.

Unfortunate princess! She deserved a happier fate! But I am consoled by these

reflections: first, that she sees her descendants among the most respectable families in Virginia; and that they are not only superior to the false shame of disavowing her as their ancestor; but that they pride themselves, and with reason too, on the honour of their descent; secondly, that she herself has gone to a country where she finds her noble wishes realized; where the distinction of colour is no more; but where, indeed, it is perfectly immaterial "what complexion an Indian or an African sun may have burned" on the pilgrim.

Adieu, my dear S........ This train of thought has destroyed the tone of my spirits: when I recover them, you shall hear further from me. Once more, adieu!

LETTER V*.

Richmond, September 23.

THIS town, my dear S......., is the residence of several conspicuous characters; some of whose names we have heard on the other side of the Atlantic. You shall be better acquainted with them before we finish this correspondence. For the present, permit me to introduce to your acquaintance, the .... of the commonwealth of Virginia, and the .... of the United States.

These gentlemen are eminent political opponents; the first belonging to the re-

* The donee of the manuscript begs that he may not be considered as responsible for the accuracy with which certain characters are delineated in this letter. He selects it purely for the advantage which, he supposes, youthful readers may derive from the writer's reflections on the characters attempted to be drawn by him.

publican, the latter leading the van of the federal, party. Such is the interest which they both have in the confidence and affections of their respective parties, that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for any Virginian to delineate either of their characters justly. Friendship or hostility would be almost sure to overcharge the picture. But for me, I have so little connection with this country, or her concerns, either at present or in prospect, that I believe I can look on her most exalted characters without envy, or prejudice of any kind; and draw them with the same cool and philosophic impartiality, as if I were a sojourner from another planet. If I fail in the delineation, the fault must be in the hand or in the head, in the pencil or the judgment; and not in any prepossession near my heart.

I choose to bring those two characters, before you, together; because they exhibit, with great vivacity, an intellectual

phenomenon, which I have noticed more than once before; and in the solution of which I should be pleased to see your pen employed: I mean the very different celerity in the movement of two sound minds, which on all subjects, wherein there is no mixture of party zeal, will ultimately come to the same just conclusion. What a pity it is that Mr. Locke, while he was dissecting the human understanding with such skill and felicity, did not advert to this characteristic variance in the minds of men. It would have been in his power, by developing its causes, either to point to the remedy, if it exist at all, or to relieve the man of slow mind from the labour of fruitless experiments, by showing the total impracticability of his cure. But, to our gentlemen; and in order that you may know them the more intimately, I will endeavour to prefix to each character a portrait of the person.

The .... of this commonwealth is the same .... who was, not many years ago, the .... at Paris. His present office is sufficient evidence of the estimation in which he is held by his native state. In his stature he is about the middle height of men, rather firmly set, with nothing further remarkable in his person, except its muscular compactness and apparent ability to endure labour. His countenance, when grave, has rather the expression of sternness and irascibility: a smile however (and a smile is not unusual with him in a social circle) lights it up to very high advantage, and gives it a most impressive and engaging air of suavity and benevolence. Judging merely from his countenance, he is between the ages of forty-five and fifty years. His dress and personal appearance are those of a plain and modest gentleman. He is a man of soft, polite, and even assiduous attentions; but these, although they are

always well timed, judicious, and evidently the offspring of an obliging and philanthropic temper, are never performed with the striking and captivating graces of a Marlborough or a Bolingbroke. To be plain, there is often in his manner an inartificial and even an aukward simplicity, which, while it provokes the smile of a more polished person, forces him to the opinion, that Mr. .... is a man of a most sincere and artless soul.

Nature has given him a mind neither rapid nor rich; and therefore he cannot shine on a subject which is entirely new to him. But to compensate him for this, he is indued with a spirit of generous and restless emulation; a judgment solid, strong, and clear; and a habit of application, which no difficulties can shake, no labours can tire.

With these aids, simply, he has qualified himself for the first honours of this country;

and presents a most happy illustration of the truth of the maxim, *Quisque, suæ fortunæ, faber.* For his emulation has urged him to perpetual and unremitting inquiry; his patient and unwearied industry has concentrated before him all the lights which others have thrown on the subjects of his consideration, together with all those which his own mind, by repeated efforts, is enabled to strike; while his sober, steady, and faithful judgment has saved him from the common error of more quick and brilliant geniuses: the too hasty adoption of specious, but false conclusions.

These qualities render him a safe and an able counsellor. And by their constant exertion, he has amassed a store of knowledge, which, having passed seven times through the crucible, is almost as highly corrected as human knowledge can be: and which certainly may be much more safely relied on, than the sponta-

neous and luxuriant growth of a more fertile, but less chastened mind—"a wild, where weeds and flowers promiscuous shoot."

Having engaged very early, first in the life of a soldier, then of a statesman, then of a laborious practitioner of the law, and finally, again of a politician, his intellectual operations have been almost entirely confined to juridical and political topics. Indeed, it is easy to perceive, that the mind of a man, engaged in so active a life, must possess more native suppleness, versatility, and vigour, than that of Mr. ......, to be able to make an advantageous tour of the sciences in the rare interval of importunate duties. It is possible that the early habit of contemplating subjects as expanded as the earth itself, with all the relative interests of the great nations thereof, may have inspired him with an indifference, perhaps an inaptitude, for

mere points of literature. Algernon Sidney has said that he deems all studies unworthy the serious regard of a man, except the study of the principles of just government; and Mr. ......, perhaps, concurs with our countryman in this as well as in his other principles. Whatever may have been the occasion, his acquaintance with the fine arts is certainly very limited and superficial: but, making allowances for his bias towards republicanism, he is a profound and even an eloquent statesman.

Knowing him to be attached to that political party, who, by their opponents, are called sometimes democrats, sometimes jacobins; and aware also, that he was a man of warm and even ardent temper, I dreaded much, when I first entered his company, that I should have been shocked and disgusted with the narrow, virulent, and rancorous invectives of

party animosity*. How agreeably, how delightfully, was I disappointed! Not one sentiment of intolerance polluted his lips. On the contrary, whether they be the offspring of rational induction, of the habit of surveying men and things on a great scale, of native magnanimity, or of a combination of all those causes, his principles, as far as they were exhibited to me, were forbearing, liberal, widely extended, and great.

As the elevated ground, which he already holds, has been gained merely by the dint of application; as every new step which he mounts becomes a mean of increasing his powers still further, by opening a wider horizon to his view, and thus stimulating his enterprise afresh, reinvigorating his habits, multiplying the materials and extending the range of his know-

* The cloven foot of the Briton is visible; or, else, why from the premises could he have expected such a consequence?

ledge; it would be matter of no surprise to me, if, before his death, the world should see him at the head of the American administration. So much for the .... of the commonwealth of Virginia: a living, an honourable, an illustrious monument of self-created eminence, worth, and greatness!

Let us now change the scene, and lead forward a very different character indeed: a truant, but a highly favoured pupil of nature. It would seem as if this capricious goddess had finished the two characters, purely with the view of exhibiting a vivid contrast. Nor is this contrast confined to their minds.

The .... of the United States is, in his person, tall, meagre, emaciated; his muscles relaxed, and his joints so loosely connected, as not only to disqualify him, apparently, for any vigorous exertion of body, but to destroy every thing like

elegance and harmony in his air and movements. Indeed, in his whole appearance and demeanor; dress, attitudes, gesture; sitting, standing, or walking; he is as far removed from the idolized graces of lord Chesterfield, as any other gentleman on earth. To continue the portrait: his head and face are small in proportion to his height; his complexion swarthy; the muscles of his face, being relaxed, give him the appearance of a man of fifty years of age, nor can he be much younger; his countenance has a faithful expression of great good humour and hilarity; while his black eyes—that unerring index—possess an irradiating spirit, which proclaims the imperial powers of the mind that sits enthroned within.

This extraordinary man, without the aid of fancy, without the advantages of person, voice, attitude, gesture, or any of the ornaments of an orator, deserves to be considered as one of the most eloquent

men in the world; if eloquence may be said to consist in the power of seizing the attention with irresistible force, and never permitting it to elude the grasp, until the hearer has received the conviction which the speaker intends.

As to his person, it has already been described. His voice is dry and hard; his attitude, in his most effective orations, was often extremely aukward; as it was not unusual for him to stand with his left foot in advance; while all his gesture proceeded from his right arm, and consisted merely in a vehement, perpendicular swing of it, from about the elevation of his head, to the bar, behind which he was accustomed to stand.

As to fancy, if she hold a seat in his mind at all, which I very much doubt, his gigantic genius tramples with disdain on all her flower-decked plats and blooming parterres. How then, you will ask,

with a look of incredulous curiosity, how is it possible, that such a man can hold the attention of an audience enchained, through a speech of even ordinary length? I will tell you.

He possesses one original, and almost supernatural faculty: the faculty of developing a subject by a single glance of his mind, and detecting at once the very point on which every controversy depends. No matter what the question: though ten times more knotty than "the gnarled oak," the lightning of heaven is not more rapid nor more resistless than his astonishing penetration. Nor does the exercise of it seem to cost him an effort. On the contrary, it is as easy as vision. I am persuaded that his eyes do not fly over a landscape, and take in its various objects, with more promptitude and facility, than his mind embraces and analizes the most complex subject.

Possessing while at the bar this intellectual elevation, which enabled him to look down and comprehend the whole ground at once, he determined immediately, and without difficulty, on which side the question might be most advantageously approached and assailed. In a bad cause, his art consisted in laying his premises so remotely from the point directly in debate, or else in terms so general and so specious, that the hearer, seeing no consequence which could be drawn from them, was just as willing to admit them as not; but, his premises once admitted, the demonstration, however distant, followed as certainly, as cogently, as inevitably, as any demonstration in Euclid.

All his eloquence consists in the apparently deep self-conviction, and emphatic earnestness of his manner; the correspondent simplicity and energy of his style; the close and logical connection of his

thoughts; and the easy gradations by which he opens his lights on the attentive minds of his hearers.

The audience are never permitted to pause for a moment. There is no stopping to weave garlands of flowers, to hang in festoons, around a favourite argument. On the contrary, every sentence is progressive; every idea sheds new light on the subject; the listener is kept perpetually in that sweetly pleasurable vibration, with which the mind of man always receives new truths; the dawn advances in easy but unremitting pace; the subject opens gradually on the view; until, rising in high relief in all its native colours and proportions, the argument is consummated by the conviction of the delighted hearer.

The success of this gentleman has rendered it doubtful with several literary characters in this country, whether a high

fancy be of real use or advantage to any one but a poet. They contend, that although the most beautiful flights of the happiest fancy, interspersed through an argument, may give an audience the momentary delightful swell of admiration, the transient thrill of divinest rapture; yet, that they produce no lasting effect in forwarding the purpose of the speaker: on the contrary, that they break the unity and disperse the force of an argument, which otherwise advancing in close array, like the phalanx of Sparta, would carry every thing before it. They give an instance in the celebrated Curran; and pretend that his fine fancy, although it fires, dissolves, and even transports his audience to a momentary frenzy, is a real and a fatal misfortune to his clients; as it calls off the attention of the jurors from the intrinsic and essential merits of the defence; eclipses the justice of the client's cause, in the blaze of the advocate's talents; induces a suspicion of the guilt which requires such a glorious display of

refulgence to divert the inquiry; and substitutes a fruitless short-lived ecstasy, in the place of permanent and substantial conviction. Hence, they say, that the client of Mr. Curran is invariably the victim of the prosecution, which that able and eloquent advocate is employed to resist.

The doctrine, in the abstract, may be true, or, as doctor Doubty says, it may not be true; for the present, I will not trouble you with the expression of my opinion. I fear, however, my dear S......., that Mr. Curran's failures may be traced to a cause very different from any fault either in the style or execution of his enchanting defences: a cause .... but I am forgetting that this letter has yet to cross the Atlantic *.

* The sentiment which is suppressed, seems to wear the livery of Bedford, Moira, and the prince of Wales.

To return to the .... of the United States. His political adversaries allege that he is a mere lawyer; that his mind has been so long trammeled by judicial precedent, so long habituated to the quart and tierce of forensic digladiation, (as doctor Johnson would probably have called it) as to be unequal to the discussion of a great question of state. Mr. Curran, in his defence of Rowan, seems to have santioned the probability of such an effect from such a cause, when he complains of his own mind as having been narrowed and circumscribed, by a strict and technical adherence to established forms; but in the next breath, an astonishing burst of the grandest thought, and a power of comprehension, to which there seems to be no earthly limit, proves that his complaint, as it relates to himself, is entirely without foundation:

Indeed, if the objection to the .... mean any thing more than that he has

not had the same illumination and exercise in matters of state as if he had devoted his life to them, I am unwilling to admit it. The force of a cannon is the same, whether pointed at a rampart or a man of war, although practice may have made the engineer more expert in the one case than in the other. So it is clear, that practice may give a man a greater command over one class of subjects than another; but the inherent energy of his mind remains the same, whithersoever it may be directed. From this impression I have never seen any cause to wonder at what is called a universal genius: it proves only that the man has applied a powerful mind to the consideration of a great variety of subjects, and pays a compliment rather to his superior industry, than his superior intellect. I am very certain that the gentleman of whom we are speaking, possesses the *acumen* which might constitute him a universal genius, according to the usual acceptation of the

phrase. But if he be the truant, which his warmest friends represent him to be, there is very little probability that he will ever reach this distinction.

Think you, my dear S......., that the two gentlemen, whom I have attempted to portray to you, were, according to the notion of Helvetius, born with equal minds; and that accident or education has produced the striking difference which we perceive to exist between them? I wish it were the case; and that the .... would be pleased to reveal to us, by what accident, or what system of education, he has acquired his peculiar sagacity and promptitude. Until this shall be done, I fear I must consider the hypothesis of Helvetius as a splendid and flattering dream.

But I tire you:—adieu, for the present, friend and guardian of my youth.

LETTER VI.

Jamestown, September 27.

I HAVE taken a pleasant ride of sixty miles down the river, in order, my dear S......., to see the remains of the first English settlement in Virginia.

The site is a very handsome one. The river is three miles broad; and, on the opposite shore, the country presents a fine range of bold and beautiful hills. But I find no vestiges of the ancient town, except the ruins of a church steeple, and a disordered group of old tombstones. On one of these, shaded by the boughs of a tree, whose trunk has embraced and grown over the edge of the stone, and seated on the head-stone of another grave, I now address you.

What a moment for a lugubrious meditation among the tombs! But fear not; I have neither the temper nor the genius of a Hervey: and, as much as I revere his pious memory, I cannot envy him the possession of such a genius and such a temper. For my own part, I would not have suffered the mournful pleasure of writing his book, and doctor Young's Night Thoughts, for all the just fame which they have both gained by those celebrated productions. Much rather would I have danced, and sung, and played the fiddle with Yorick, through the whimsical pages of Tristram Shandy: that book which every body justly censures and admires alternately; and which will continue to be read, abused, and devoured, with ever fresh delight, as long as the world shall relish a joyous laugh, or a tear of the most delicious feeling.

By the by, here, on one side, is an inscription on a gravestone, which would

constitute no bad theme for an occasional meditation from Yorick himself. The stone, it seems, covers the grave of a man who was born in the neighbourhood of London; and his epitaph concludes the short and rudely executed account of his birth and death, by declaring him to have been "a great sinner, in hopes of a joyful resurrection;" as if he had sinned, with no other intention than to give himself a fair title to these exulting hopes. But aukwardly and ludicrously as the sentiment is expressed, it is in its meaning most just and beautiful; as it acknowledges the boundless mercy of Heaven, and glances at that divinely consoling proclamation, "come unto me, all ye who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

The ruin of the steeple is about thirty feet high, and mantled to its very summit with ivy. It is difficult to look at this venerable object, surrounded as it is with

these awful proofs of the mortality of man, without exclaiming in the pathetic solemnity of our Shakspeare,

"The cloudcapt towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a wreck behind."

Whence, my dear S......., arises the irrepressible reverence and tender affection with which I look at this broken steeple? Is it, that my soul, by a secret, subtile process invests the mouldering ruin with her own powers; imagines it a fellow being; a venerable old man; a Nestor, or an Ossian, who has witnessed and survived the ravages of successive generations, the companions of his youth, and of his maturity, and now mourns his own solitary and desolate condition, and hails their spirits in every passing cloud? Whatever may be the cause, as I look at it, I feel my soul drawn forward, as by the cords

of gentlest sympathy, and involuntarily open my lips to offer consolation to the drooping pile.

Where, my S......., is the busy, bustling crowd which landed here two hundred years ago? Where is Smith, that pink of gallantry, that flower of chivalry? I fancy that I can see their first slow and cautious approach to the shore; their keen and vigilant eyes, piercing the forest in every direction, to detect the lurking Indian, with his tomahawk, bow, and arrow. Good heavens! what an enterprise! how full of the most fearful perils! and yet how entirely profitless to the daring men who personally undertook and achieved it! Through what a series of the most spirit-chilling hardships had they to toil! How often did they cast their eyes to England in vain! and with what delusive hopes, day after day, did the little famished crew strain their sight to catch the white sail of comfort and relief! But, day after day,

the sun set, and darkness covered the earth; but no sail of comfort or relief came! How often, in the pangs of hunger, sickness, solitude, and disconsolation, did they think of London, her shops, her markets groaning under the weight of plenty; her streets swarming with gilded coaches, bustling hacks, with crowds of lords, ladies, and commons, with healthy, busy, contented faces of every description; and among them none more healthy or more contented than those of their ungrateful and improvident directors! But now—where are they all? the little famished colony which landed here, and the many-coloured crowd of London,—where are they, my dear S.......? Gone, where there is no distinction! consigned to the common earth! Another generation succeeded them: which, just as busy and as bustling as that which fell before it, has sunk down into the same nothingness! Another, and yet another billow has rolled on, each emulating its predecessor in height; towering

for its moment, and curling its foaming honours to the clouds; then roaring, breaking, and perishing on the same shore!

Is it not strange, that, familiarly and universally as these things are known, yet each generation is as eager in the pursuit of its earthly objects, projects its plans on a scale as extensive, and labours in their execution with a spirit as ardent and unrelaxing, as if this life and this world were to last for ever? It is indeed a most benevolent interposition of Providence, that these palpable and just views of the vanity of human life are not permitted entirely to crush the spirits and unnerve the arm of industry. But at the same time, methinks, it would be wise in man to permit them to have, at least, so much weight with him as to prevent his total absorption by the things of this earth, and to point some of his thoughts and his exertions to a system of being far more permanent,

exalted, and happy. Think not this reflection too solemn: it is irresistibly inspired by the objects around me; and, as rarely as it occurs, (much too rarely!) it is most certainly and solemnly true, my S.......!

It is curious to reflect, what a nation, in the course of two hundred years, has sprung up and flourished from the feeble sickly germ which was planted here! Little did our short-sighted court suspect the conflict which she was preparing for herself; the convulsive throe by which her infant colony would in a few years burst from her, and start into a political importance that would astonish the earth!

But Virginia, my dear S......., as rapidly as her population and her wealth must continue to advance, wants one most important source of solid grandeur; and that, too, the animating soul of a republic.

I mean public spirit; that sacred *amor patriæ*, which filled Greece and Rome with patriots, heroes, and scholars.

There seems to me to be but one object throughout the state, *to grow rich*; a passion which is visible not only in the walks of private life, but which has crept into and poisoned every public body in the state. Indeed, from the very genius of the government, by which all the public characters are, at short periodical elections, evolved from the body of the people, it cannot but happen, that the councils of the state must take the impulse of the private propensities of the country. Hence, Virginia exhibits no great public improvements; hence, in spite of her wealth, every part of the country manifests her sufferings, either from the penury of her guardians, or their want of that attention and noble pride wherewith it is their duty to consult her appearance. Her roads and highways are frequently impassable, some-

times frightful; the very few public works which have been set on foot, instead of being carried on with spirit, are permitted to languish and pine, and creep feebly along, in such a manner that the first part of an edifice grows grey with age, and almost tumbles in ruins, before the last part is lifted from the dust; her highest officers are sustained with so avaricious, so niggardly a hand, that if they are not driven to subsist on roots and drink ditch-water with old Fabricius, it is not for the want of republican economy in the projectors of the salaries; and, above all, the general culture of the human mind, that best cure for the aristocratic distinctions which they profess to hate, that best basis of the social and political equality which they profess to love: this culture, instead of becoming a national care, is intrusted merely to such individuals as hazard, indigence, misfortunes, or crimes have forced from their native Europe, to seek an asylum and bread in the wilds of America.

They have only one public seminary of learning: a college in Williamsburg, about seven miles from this place; which was erected in the reign of our William and Mary, derives its principal support from their munificence, and therefore very properly bears their names. This college, in the fastidious folly and affectation of republicanism, or, what is worse, in the niggardly spirit of parsimony, which they dignify with the name of economy, these democrats have endowed with a few despicable fragments of surveyor's fees, &c.; thus converting their national academy into a mere *lazaretto*, and feeding its polite, scientific, and highly respectable professors, like a band of beggars, on the scraps and crumbs that fall from the financial table. And then, instead of aiding and energizing the police of the college by a few civil regulations, they permit their youth to run riot in all the wildness of dissipation; while the venerable professors are forced to look on, in the deep

mortification of conscious impotence, and see their care and zeal requited by the ruin of their pupils and the destruction of their seminary.

These are points which, at present, I can barely touch; when I have an easier seat and writing-desk, than a grave and a tombstone, it will give me pleasure to dilate on them; for it will afford an opportunity of exulting in the superiority of our own energetic monarchy over this republican body without a soul*.

For the present, my dear S.......! I bid you adieu.

* British insolence! Yet it cannot be denied, however painful the admission, that there is some foundation for his censures.

LETTER VII.

Richmond, October 10.

I HAVE been, my dear S.......! on an excursion through the counties which lie along the eastern side of the Blue Ridge. A general description of that country and its inhabitants may form the subject of a future letter. For the present, I must entertain you with an account of a most singular and interesting adventure which I met with in the course of the tour.

It was one Sunday, as I travelled through the county of Orange, that my eye was caught by a cluster of horses tied near a ruinous, old, wooden house in the forest, not far from the road side. Having frequently seen such objects before, in travelling through these states, I had no dif-

ficulty in understanding that this was a place of religious worship.

Devotion alone should have stopped me to join in the duties of the congregation; but I must confess, that curiosity to hear the preacher of such a wilderness was not the least of my motives. On entering I was struck with his preternatural appearance. He was a tall and very spare old man; his head, which was covered with a white linen cap, his shrivelled hands, and his voice, were all shaking under the influence of a palsy; and a few moments ascertained to me that he was perfectly blind!

The first emotions which touched my breast were those of mingled pity and veneration. But ah! sacred God! how soon were all my feelings changed! The lips of Plato were never more worthy of a prognostic swarm of bees than were the lips of this holy man! It was a day of

the administration of the sacrament; and his subject, of course, was the Passion of our Saviour. I had heard the subject handled a thousand times: I had thought it exhausted long ago. Little did I suppose, that in the wild woods of America I was to meet with a man whose eloquence would give to this topic a new and more sublime pathos than I had ever before witnessed!

As he descended from the pulpit to distribute the mystic symbols, there was a peculiar, a more than human solemnity in his air and manner, which made my blood run cold and my whole frame shiver!

He then drew a picture of the sufferings of our Saviour; his trial before Pilate; his ascent up Calvary; his crucifixion; and his death. I knew the whole history; but never, until then, had I heard the circumstances so selected, so arranged, so co-

loured! It was all new; and I seemed to have heard it for the first time in my life. His enunciation was so deliberate that his voice trembled on every syllable, and every heart in the assembly trembled in unison. His peculiar phrases had that force of description, that the original scene appeared to be, at that moment, acting before our eyes! We saw the very faces of the Jews: the staring, frightful distortions of malice and rage! We saw the buffet: my soul kindled with a flame of indignation; and my hands were involuntarily and convulsively clenched!

But when he came to touch on the patience, the forgiving meekness of our Saviour; when he drew to the life his blessed eyes streaming in tears to heaven; his voice breathing to God a soft and gentle prayer of pardon on his enemies, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"—the voice of the preacher, which

had all along faltered, grew fainter and fainter, until his utterance being entirely obstructed by the force of his feelings, he raised his handkerchief to his eyes, and burst into a loud and irrepressible flood of grief. The effect is inconceivable: the whole house resounded with the mingled groans, and sobs, and shrieks of the congregation!

It was some time before the tumult had subsided so far as to permit him to proceed. Indeed, judging by the usual, but fallacious standard of my own weakness, I began to be very uneasy for the situation of the preacher. For I could not conceive how he would be able to let his audience down from the height to which he had wound them, without impairing the solemnity and dignity of his subject, or perhaps shocking them by the abruptness of the fall. But—no: the descent was as beautiful and sublime as the elevation had been rapid and enthusiastic!

The first sentence, with which he broke the awful silence, was a quotation from Rousseau: "Socrates died like a philosopher, but Jesus Christ like a God!"

I despair of giving you any idea of the effect produced by this short sentence, unless you could perfectly conceive the whole manner of the man, as well as the peculiar crisis in the discourse. Never before did I completely understand what Demosthenes meant by laying such stress on *delivery*. You are to bring before you the venerable figure of the preacher: his blindness, constantly recalling to your recollection old Homer, Ossian, and Milton, and associating with his performance the melancholy grandeur of their geniuses; you are to imagine that you hear his slow, solemn, well-accented enunciation, and his voice of affecting trembling melody; you are to remember the pitch of passion and enthusiasm to which the congregation were raised; and then the few minutes of

portentous deathlike silence which reigned throughout the house: the preacher removing his white handkerchief from his aged face, (even yet wet from the recent torrent of his tears) and slowly stretching forth the palsied hand which holds it, begins the sentence: "Socrates died like a philosopher"—then pausing, raising his other hand, pressing them both, clasped together, with warmth and energy to his breast, lifting his "sightless balls" to heaven, and pouring his whole soul into his tremulous voice—"but Jesus Christ—like a God!" If he had been indeed and in truth an angel of light, the effect could scarcely have been more divine.

Whatever I had been able to conceive of the sublimity of Massillon or the force of Bourdaloue, had fallen far short of the power which I felt from the delivery of this simple sentence. The blood, which just before had rushed in a hurricane upon my brain, and, in the violence and agony

of my feelings, had held my whole system in suspense, now ran back into my heart, with a sensation which I cannot describe: a kind of shuddering delicious horror! The paroxysm of blended pity and indignation, to which I had been transported, subsided into the deepest self-abasement, humility, and adoration. I had just been lacerated and dissolved by sympathy for our Saviour as a fellow-creature; but now, with fear and trembling, I adored him as —"a God!"

If this description give you the impression, that this incomparable minister had any thing of shallow theatrical trick in his manner, it does him great injustice. I have never seen in any other orator such an union of simplicity and majesty. He has not a gesture, an attitude, or an accent, to which he does not seem forced by the sentiment which he is expressing. His mind is too serious, too earnest, too solicitous, and at the same time too dignified

to stoop to artifice. Although as far removed from ostentation as a man can be, yet it is clear from the train, the style, and substance of his thoughts, that he is not only a very polite scholar, but a man of extensive and profound erudition. I was forcibly struck with a short yet beautiful character which he drew of our learned and amiable countryman, Sir Robert Boyle: he spoke of him, as if "his noble mind had, even before death, divested herself of all influence from his frail tabernacle of flesh;" and called him, in his peculiarly emphatic and impressive manner, "a pure intelligence; the link between men and angels."

This man has been before my imagination almost ever since. A thousand times, as I rode along, I dropped the reins of my bridle, stretched forth my hand, and tried to imitate his quotation from Rousseau: a thousand times I abandoned the attempt in despair, and felt persuaded that his

peculiar manner and power arose from an energy of soul, which nature could give, but which no human being could justly copy. In short, he seems to be altogether a being of a former age, or of a totally different nature from the rest of men. As I recal, at this moment, several of his awfully striking attitudes, the chilling tide, with which my blood begins to pour along my arteries, reminds me of the emotions produced by the first sight of Gray's introductory picture of his Bard:

> "On a rock, whose haughty brow
> Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,
> Rob'd in the sable garb of woe,
> With haggard eyes the poet stood;
> (Loose his beard and hoary hair
> Streamed, like a meteor, to the troubled air:)
> And with a poet's hand and prophet's fire
> Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre."

Guess my surprise, when, on my arrival at Richmond, and mentioning the name of this man, I found not one person who had ever before heard of *James Waddell!*

Is it not strange, that such a genius as this, so accomplished a scholar, so divine an orator, should be permitted to languish and die in obscurity within eighty miles of the metropolis of Virginia? To me it is a conclusive argument, either that the Virginians have no taste for the highest strains of the most sublime oratory, or that they are destitute of a much more important quality, the love of genuine and exalted religion.

Indeed, it is too clear, my friend, that this soil abounds more in weeds of foreign birth than in good and salubrious fruits. Among others, the noxious weed of infidelity has struck a deep, a fatal root, and spread its pestilential branches far around. I fear that our eccentric and fanciful countryman, Godwin, has contributed not a little to water and cherish this pernicious exotic. There is a novelty, a splendor, a boldness in his scheme of morals, pecu-

liarly fitted to captivate a youthful and an ardent mind. A young man feels his delicacy flattered in the idea of being emancipated from the old, obsolete, and vulgar motives of moral conduct; and acting correctly from motives quite new, refined, and sublimated in the crucible of pure abstracted reason. Unfortunately, however, in this attempt to change the motives of his conduct, he loses the old ones, while the new, either from being too ethereal and sublime, or from some other want of congeniality, refuse to mix and lay hold of the gross materials of his nature. Thus he becomes emancipated indeed; discharged not only from ancient and vulgar shackles, but also from the modern, finespun, tinselled restraints of his divine Godwin. Having imbibed the high spirit of literary adventure, he disdains the limits of the moral world; and advancing boldly to the throne of God, he questions him on his dispensations, and

demands the reasons of his laws. But the counsels of heaven are *above* the ken, *not contrary to* the voice, of human reason; and the unfortunate youth, unable to reach and measure them, recoils from the attempt, with melancholy rashness, into infidelity and deism. Godwin's glittering theories are on his lips. Utopia or Mezorania boast not of a purer moralist *in words* than the young Godwinian; but the unbridled licentiousness of *his conduct* makes it manifest, that if Godwin's principles be true in the abstract, they are not fit for this system of things, whatever they might be in the republic of Plato.

From a life of inglorious indolence, by far too prevalent among the young men of this country, the transition is easy and natural to immorality and dissipation. It is at this giddy period of life, when a series of dissolute courses have debauched the purity and innocence of the heart,

shaken the pillars of the understanding, and converted her sound and wholesome operations into little more than a set of feverish starts and incoherent and delirious dreams; it is in such a situation that a new-fangled theory is welcomed as an amusing guest, and deism is embraced as a balmy comforter against the pangs of an offended conscience. This coalition once formed and habitually consolidated, "farewell, a long farewell," to honour, genius, and glory! From such a gulf of complicated ruin few have the energy even to attempt an escape. The moment of cool reflection, which should save them, is too big with horror to be endured. Every plunge is deeper and deeper, until the tragedy is finally wound up by a pistol or a halter. Do not believe that I am drawing from fancy: the picture is unfortunately true. Few dramas, indeed, have yet reached their catastrophe; but too many are in a rapid progress towards it.

These thoughts are affecting and oppressive: I am glad to retreat from them by bidding you adieu; and offering my prayers to heaven, that you may never ose the pure, the genial consolations of unshaken faith and an approving conscience. Once more, my dear S......., adieu!

LETTER VIII.

Richmond, October 15.

Men of talents in this country, my dear S......., have been generally bred to the profession of the law: and, indeed, throughout the United States I have met with few persons of exalted intellect whose powers have been directed to any other pursuit. The bar in America is the road to honour; and hence, although the profession is graced by the most shining geniuses on the continent, it is encumbered also by a melancholy group of young men, who hang on the rear of the bar, like Goethe's sable clouds in the western horizon. I have been told that the bar of Virginia was, a few years ago, pronounced by the supreme court of the United States to be the most enlightened and able on

the continent. I am very incompetent to decide on the merit of their legal acquirements; but, putting aside the partiality of a Briton, I do not think either of the gentlemen by any means so eloquent or so erudite as our countryman Erskine. With your permission, however, I will make you better acquainted with the few characters who lead the van of the profession.

Mr. .... has great personal advantages. A figure large and portly; his features uncommonly fine; his dark eyes and his whole countenance lighted up with an expression of the most conciliating sensibility; his attitudes dignified and commanding; his gesture easy and graceful; his voice perfect harmony; and his whole manner that of an accomplished and engaging gentleman. I have reason to believe that the expression of his countenance does no more than justice to his heart. If I be correctly informed, his feelings are exquisite; and the proofs of

his benevolence are various and clear beyond the possibility of doubt. He has filled the highest offices in this commonwealth, and has very long maintained a most respectable rank in his profession. His character with the people is that of a great lawyer and an eloquent speaker; and, indeed, so many men of discernment and taste entertain this opinion, and my prepossessions in his favour are so strong, on account of the amiable qualities of his character, that I am very well disposed to doubt the accuracy of my own judgment as it relates to him.

To me, however, it seems that his mind, as is often, but not invariably the case, corresponds with his personal appearance: that is, that it is turned rather for ornament than for severe use: *Pompæ, quam pugnæ aptior*, as Tully expresses it. His speeches, I think, deserve the censure which Lord Verulam pronounces on the writers posterior to the reformation of the

church: "Luther," says he, "standing alone against the church of Rome, found it necessary to awake all antiquity in his behalf: this introduced the study of the dead languages, a taste for the fulness of the Ciceronian manner; and hence the still prevalent error of hunting more after words than matter; and more after the choiceness of the phrase and the round and clean composition of the sentence, and the sweet fallings of the clauses, and the varying and illustration of their works with tropes and figures, than after the weight of matter, worth of subject, soundness of argument, life of invention, or depth of judgment."

Mr. ....'s temper and habits lead him to the swelling stately manner of Bolingbroke; but either from the want of promptitude and richness of conception, or his too sedulous concern and "hunting after words," he does not maintain that manner smoothly and happily. On the

contrary, the spirits of his hearers, after having been awakened and put into sweet and pleasant motion, have their tide not unfrequently checked, ruffled, and painfully obstructed by the hesitation and perplexity of the speaker. It certainly must demand, my dear S......., a mind of very high powers to support the swell of Bolingbroke with felicity. The tones of voice which naturally belong to it keep the expectation continually "on tiptoe;" and this must be gratified not only by the most oily fluency, but by a course of argument clear as light, and an alternate play of imagination as grand and magnificent as Herschell's dance of the sidereal system. The work requires to be perpetually urged forward. One interruption in the current of the language, one poor thought or abortion of fancy, one vacant aversion of the eye or relaxation in the expression of face, entirely breaks and dissolves the whole charm. The speaker, indeed, may go on and evolve here and there a pretty thought;

but the wondrous magic of the whole is gone for ever!

Whether it be from any defect in the organization of Mr. ....'s mind, or that his passion for the fine dress of his thoughts is the master passion, which, "like Aaron's serpent swallows up the rest," I will not undertake to decide; but perhaps it results from one of those two causes, that all the arguments which I have ever heard from him are defective in that important and most material character, the *lucidus ordo.*

I have been sometimes inclined to believe, that a man's division of his argument would be generally found to contain a secret history of the difficulties which he himself has encountered in the investigation of his subject. I am firmly persuaded that the extreme prolixity of many discourses, to which we are doomed to listen, is chargeable not to the fertility but to the darkness and impotence of the brain

which produces them. A man who sees his object in a strong light marches directly up to it in a right line, with the firm step of a soldier; while another, residing in a less illumined zone, wanders and reels in the twilight of the brain, and ere he attain his object, treads a maze as intricate and perplexing as that of the celebrated labyrinth of Crete.

It was remarkable of the .... of the United States, whom I mentioned to you in a former letter as looking through a subject at a single glance, that he almost invariably seized one strong point only, the pivot of the controversy: this point he would enforce with all his powers, never permitting his own mind to waver, nor obscuring those of his hearers by a cloud of inferior unimportant considerations. But this is not the manner of Mr. ....; I suspect, that in the preparatory investigation of a subject he gains his ground by slow and laborious gradations; and

that his difficulties are numerous and embarrassing. Hence it is, perhaps, that his points are generally too multifarious; and although, among the rest, he exhibits the strong point, its appearance is too often like that of Issachar, "bowed down between two burdens." I take this to be a very ill-judged method. It may serve indeed to make the multitude stare; but it frustrates the great purpose of the speaker. Instead of giving a simple, lucid, and animated view of a subject, it overloads, confounds, and fatigues the listener. Instead of leaving him under the vivacity of clear and full conviction, it leaves him bewildered, darkling, asleep; and when he awakes, he

> ——— "wakes, emerging from a sea of dreams
> Tumultuous; where his wreck'd, desponding thought,
> From wave to wave of wild uncertainty
> At random drove, her helm of reason lost."

I incline to believe that if there be a blemish in the mind of this amiable gen-

tleman, it is the want of a strong and masculine judgment. If such an agent had wielded the sceptre of his understanding, it is presumable that ere this it would have chastised his exuberant fondness for literary finery, and the too ostentatious and unfortunate parade of points in his argument, on which I have just commented. If I may confide in the replies which I have heard given to him at the bar, this want of judgment is sometimes manifested in his selection and application of law cases. But of this I can judge only from the triumphant air with which his adversaries seize his cases, and appear to turn them against him.

He is certainly a man of close and elaborate research. It would seem to me, however, my dear S......., that in order to constitute a scientific lawyer, something more is necessary than the patient and persevering revolution of the leaves of an author. Does it not require a discernment

sufficiently clear and strong to eviscerate the principles of each case; a judgment potent enough to digest, connect, and systematize them, and to distinguish at once, in any future combination of circumstances, the very feature which gives or refuses to a principle a just application? Without such intellectual properties, I should conjecture (for on this subject I can only conjecture) that a man could not have the fair advantage and perfect command of his reading. For, in the first place, I should apprehend, that he would never discover the application of a case without the recurrence of all the same circumstances; in the next place, that his cases would form a perfect chaos, a *rudis indigestaque moles*, in his brain; and lastly, that he would often and sometimes perhaps fatally mistake the identifying feature, and furnish his antagonist with a formidable weapon against himself.

But let me fly from this entangled wilderness, of which I have so little knowledge, and return to Mr. .... Although, when brought to the standard of perfect oratory, he may be subject to the censures which I have passed on him; yet it is to be acknowledged, and I make the acknowledgment with pleasure, that he is a man of extensive reading, a well informed lawyer, a fine *belles lettres* scholar, and sometimes a beautiful speaker.

The gentleman who has been pointed out to me as holding the next if not an equal grade in the profession is Mr. .... He is, I am told, upwards of forty years of age; but his look, I think, is more juvenile. As to stature, he is about the ordinary height of men; his form genteel, his person agile. He is distinguished by a quickness of look, a sprightly step, and that peculiarly jaunty air which I have heretofore mentioned as

characterizing the people of New York. It is an air, however, which (perhaps, because I am a plain son of *John Bull)* is not entirely to my taste. Striking, indeed, it is; highly genteel, and calculated for *eclat;* but then, I fear, that it may be censured as being too artificial; as having, therefore, too little appearance of connection with the heart; too little of that amiable simplicity, that winning softness, that vital warmth, which I have felt in the manner of a certain friend of mine. This objection, however, is not meant to touch his heart. I do not mean to censure his sensibility or his virtues. The remark applies only to the mere exterior of *his manners;* and even the censure, which I have pronounced on *that,* is purely the result of a different taste, which is, at least, as probably wrong as that of Mr. ....

Indeed, my dear S......., I have seen few eminent men in this or any other

country, who have been able so far to repress the exulting pride of conscious talents, as to put on the behaviour which is calculated to win the hearts of the people. I mean that behaviour which steers between a lowspirited, cringing sycophancy and ostentatious condescension on the one hand, and a haughty self-importance and supercilious contempt of one's fellow creatures on the other; that behaviour, in which, while a man displays a just respect for his own feelings and character, he seems, nevertheless, to concentre himself with the disposition and inclinations of the person to whom he speaks: in a word, that happy behaviour, in which versatility and candour, modesty and dignity, are sweetly and harmoniously attempered and blended. Any Englishman but yourself, my S......., would easily recognize the original from which this latter picture is drawn.

This leads me off from the character of Mr. ...., to remark a moral defect,

which I have several times observed in this country. Many well meaning men, having heard much of the hollow ceremonious professions and hypocritical grimace of courts; disgusted with every thing which savours of aristocratic or monarchic parade; and smitten with the love of republican simplicity and honesty; have fallen into a ruggedness of deportment a thousand times more proud, more intolerable and disgusting, than Shakspeare's foppish lord, with his chin new reapt and pouncet box. They scorn to conceal their thoughts; and in the expression of them, confound bluntness with honesty. Their opinions are all *dogmas*. It is perfectly immaterial to them what any one else may think. Nay, many of them seem to have forgotten, that others can think or feel at all. In pursuit of the haggard phantom of republicanism*, they dash on, like sir Joseph Banks, giving chase to the emperor of

* This phrase is scarcely excusable, even in a Briton and a lord.

Morocco, regardless of the sweet and tender blossoms of sensibility, which fall, and bleed, and die behind them. What an error is this, my dear S.......! I am frequently disposed to ask such men, "Think you, that the stern and implacable Achilles was an honester man than the gentle, humane, and considerate Hector? Was the arrogant and imperious Alexander an honester man than the meek, compassionate, and amiable Cyrus? Was the proud, the rough, the surly Cato, more honest than the soft, polite, and delicate Scipio Africanus? In short, are not honesty and humanity compatible? And what is the most genuine and captivating politeness, but humanity refined?"

But to return from this digression. The qualities, by which Mr. .... strikes the multitude, are his ingenuity and his wit. But those, who look more closely into the anatomy of his mind, discover many properties of much higher dignity and

importance. This gentleman, in my opinion, unites in himself a greater diversity of talents and acquirements, than any other at the bar of Virginia. He has the reputation, and I doubt not a just one, of possessing much legal science. He has an exquisite and a highly cultivated taste for polite literature; a genius quick and fertile; a style pure and classic; a stream of perspicuous and beautiful elocution; an ingenuity which no difficulties can entangle or embarrass; and a wit, whose vivid and brilliant coruscations can gild and decorate the darkest subject. He chooses his ground, in the first instance, with great judgment; and when, in the progress of a cause, an unexpected evolution of testimony, or intermediate decisions from the bench, have beaten that ground from under him, he possesses a happy, an astonishing versatility, by which he is enabled at once to take a new position, without appearing to have lost an atom, either in the measure or stability

of his basis. This is a faculty which I have observed before in an inferior degree; but Mr. .... is so adroit, so superior in the execution of it, that in him it appears a new and peculiar talent. His statements, his narrations, his arguments, are all as transparent as the light of day. He reasons logically, and declaims very handsomely. It is true, he never brandishes the Olympic thunder of Homer; but then he seldom, if ever, sinks beneath the chaste and attractive majesty of Virgil.

His fault is, that he has not veiled his ingenuity with sufficient address. Hence, I am told, that he is considered as a Proteus; and the courts are disposed to doubt their senses, even when he appears in his proper shape. But in spite of this adverse and unpropitious distrust, Mr. .... 's popularity is still in its flood; and he is justly considered as an honour and an ornament to his profession.

Adieu! my friend, for the present. Ere long we may take another tour through this gallery of portraits, if more interesting objects do not call us off. Again, my S......., good night.

LETTER IX.

Richmond, October 30.

TALENTS, my dear S......., wherever they have had a suitable theatre, have never failed to emerge from obscurity and assume their proper rank in the estimation of the world. The celebrated Camden is said to have been the tenant of a garret. Yet from the darkness, poverty, and ignominy of this residence, he advanced to distinction and wealth, and graced the first offices and titles of our island. It is impossible to turn over the British biography, without being struck and charmed by the multitude of correspondent examples: a venerable group of *novi homines*, as the Romans called them: men, who, from the lowest depths of obscurity and want, and without even the influence of a

patron, have risen to the first honours of their country, and founded their own families anew. In every nation, and in every age, great talents, thrown fairly into the point of public observation, will invariably produce the same ultimate effect. The jealous pride of power may attempt to repress and crush them; the base and malignant rancour of impotent spleen and envy may strive to embarrass and retard their flight: but these efforts, so far from achieving their ignoble purpose, so far from producing a discernible obliquity in the ascent of genuine and vigorous talents, will serve only to increase their momentum, and mark their transit with an additional stream of glory.

When the great earl of Chatham first made his appearance in our house of commons, and began to astonish and transport the British parliament, and the British nation, by the boldness, the force, and range of his thoughts, and the celestial

fire and pathos of his eloquence, it is well known that the minister Walpole, and his brother Horace, (from motives very easily understood) exerted all their wit, all their oratory, all their acquirements of every description, sustained and enforced by the unfeeling " insolence of office," to heave a mountain on his gigantic genius, and hide it from the world. Poor and powerless attempt!—The tables were turned. He rose upon them in the might and irresistible energy of his genius; and in spite of all their convolutions, frantic agonies, and spasms, he strangled them and their whole faction with as much ease as Hercules did the serpent ministers of jealousy, that were sent to assail his infant cradle. Who can turn over the debates of the day, and read the account of this conflict between youthful ardour and hoaryheaded cunning and power, without kindling in the cause of the tyro, and shouting at his victory? That they should have attempted to pass off the grand, yet solid and judi-

cious operations of a mind like his, as being mere theatrical start and emotion; the giddy hair-brained eccentricities of a romantic boy! That they should have had the presumption to suppose themselves capable of chaining down to the floor of the parliament, a genius so ethereal, towering, and sublime! Why did they not, in the next breath, by way of crowning the climax of vanity, bid the magnificent fire-ball to descend from its exalted and appropriate region, and perform its splendid tour along the surface of the earth*?

* See a beautiful note in Darwin's Botanic Garden, in which the writer suggests the probability of three concentric strata of our atmosphere, in which, or between them, are produced four kinds of meteors: in the lowest, the common lightning; in the next, shooting stars; and the highest region, which he supposes to consist of inflammable gas tenfold lighter than the common atmospheric air, he makes the theatre of the northern light, and fireball or draco volans. He recites the history of one of the latter, seen in the year 1758, which was estimated to have been a mile and an half in circumference; to have been one hundred miles high; and to have moved towards the north, thirty miles

When the son of this great man too, our present minister, and his compeer and rival, our friend, first commenced their political career, the public papers teemed with strictures on their respective talents: the first was censured as being merely a dry and even a flimsy reasoner; the last was stigmatized as an empty declaimer. But error and misrepresentation soon expire, and are forgotten; while truth rises upon their ruins, and "flourishes in eternal youth." Thus the false, the light fugacious newspaper criticisms, which attempted to dissect and censure the arrangement of those gentlemen's talents, have been long since swept away by the bosom of oblivion. They wanted truth, that soul, which alone can secure immortality to any literary work. And Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox have for many years been reciprocally

in a second. It had a real tail, many miles long, which threw off sparks in its course; and the whole exploded with a sound like that of distant thunder. Bot. Garden, part i. note 1.

and alternately recognised, just as their subject demands it, either as close and cogent reasoners, or as beautiful and superb rhetoricians.

Talents, therefore, which are before the public, have nothing to dread, either from the jealous pride of power, or from the transient misrepresentations of party, spleen, or envy. In spite of opposition from any cause, their buoyant spirit will lift them to their proper grade: it would be unjust that it should lift them higher.

It is true, there always are, and always will be, in every society, individuals who will fancy themselves examples of genius overlooked, underrated, or invidiously oppressed. But the misfortune of such persons is imputable to their own vanity, and not to the public opinion, which has weighed and graduated them.

We remember many of our schoolmates, whose geniuses bloomed and died within

the walls of *Alma Mater;* but whose bodies still live, the moving monuments of departed splendor, the animated and affecting remembrancers of the extreme fragility of the human intellect. We remember others, who have entered on public life with the most exulting promise; have flown from the earth, like rockets; and, after a short and brilliant flight, have bursted with one or two explosions—to blaze no more. Others, by a few premature scintillations of thought, have led themselves and their partial friends to hope that they were fast advancing to a dawn of soft and beauteous light, and a meridian of bright and gorgeous effulgence; but their day has never yet broken, and never will it break. They are doomed for ever to that dim crepuscular light which surrounds the frozen poles, when the sun has retreated to the opposite circle of the heavens. Theirs is the eternal glimmering of the brain; and their most luminous displays are the faint twinklings of the glow-worm. We have seen others,

who, at their start, gain a casual projectility, which raises them above their proper grade; but, by the just operation of their specific gravity, they are made to subside again, and settle ultimately in the sphere to which they properly belong.

All these characters, and many others who have had even slighter bases for their once sanguine, but now blasted hopes, form a querulous and melancholy band of moonstruck declaimers against the injustice of the world, the agency of envy, the force of destiny, &c. charging their misfortune on every thing but the true cause: their own want of intrinsic sterling merit: their want of that copious perennial spring of great and useful thought; without which a man may hope in vain for growing reputation. Nor are they always satisfied with wailing their own destiny, pouring out the bitterest imprecations of their souls on the cruel stars which presided at their birth, and aspersing the justice of

the public opinion which has sealed them: too often in the contortions and pangs of disappointed ambition, they cast a scowling eye over the world of man; start back and blanch at the lustre of superior merit; and exert all the diabolical incantations of their black art, to conjure up an impervious vapour, in order to shroud its glories from the world. But it is all in vain. In spite of every thing, the public opinion will finally do justice to us all. The man who comes fairly before the world, and who possesses the great and vigorous *stamina* which entitle him to a *niche* in the temple of glory, has no reason to dread the ultimate result; however slow his progress may be, he will in the end most indubitably receive that distinction. While the rest, "the swallows of science," the butterflies of genius, may flutter for their spring; but they will soon pass away and be remembered no more. No enterprising man, therefore, (and least of all, the truly great man) has reason to droop or

repine at any efforts which he may suppose to be made with the view to depress him; since he may rely on the universal and unchanging truth, that talents, which are before the world, will most inevitably find their proper level; and this is certainly all that a just man should desire. Let then the tempest of envy or of malice howl around him. His genius will consecrate him: and any attempt to extinguish that, will be as unavailing as would a human effort "to quench the stars."

I have been led further into these reflections than I had anticipated. The train was started by casting my eyes over Virginia; observing the very few who have advanced on the theatre of public observation, and the very many who will remain for ever behind the scenes.

What frequent instances of high, native genius have I seen springing in the wilder-

nesses of this country; genius, whose blossoms the light of science has never courted into expansion; genius, which is doomed to fall and die, far from the notice and the haunts of men! How often, as I have held my way through the western forests of this state, and reflected on the vigorous shoots of superior intellect which were freezing and perishing there for the want of culture; how often have I recalled the moment, when our pathetic Gray, reclining under the mouldering elm of his country church-yard, while the sigh of genial sympathy broke from his heart, and the tear of noble pity started in his eye, exclaimed

"Perhaps, in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire,
Hands that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
Or wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre.

"But knowledge to their eyes, her ample page,
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unrol;
Chill penury repress'd their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of their soul.

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

"Some village Hampden, that, with dauntless breast,
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute, inglorious Milton, here may rest;
Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood.

"Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
And read their history in a nation's eyes.
"Their lot forbade."—

The heart of a philanthropist, no matter to what country or what form of government he may belong, immediately inquires, "And is there no mode to prevent this melancholy waste of talents? Is there no mode by which the rays of science might be so diffused over the state, as to call forth each latent bud into life and luxuriance?" There is such a mode: and what renders the legislature of this state still more inexcusable, the plan by which these important purposes might be effected, has been drawn out, and has lain by them for

nearly thirty years. The declaration of the independence of this commonwealth was made in the month of May, 1776 *. In the fall of that year, a statute, or as it is called here, "an act of assembly" was made, providing that a committee of five persons should be appointed to prepare a code of laws, adapted to the change of the state government. This code was to be submitted to the legislature of the country, and to be ratified or rejected by their suffrage.

In the ensuing November, by a resolution of the same legislature, Thomas Jefferson, Edmund Pendleton, George Wythe, George Mason, and Thomas Ludwell Lee, esquires, were appointed a com-

* This is a fact which the public journals of the state establish beyond controversy; although the legal process and other public acts of Virginia modestly wave this precedence, and date the foundation of the commonwealth on the 4th of July, 1776, the day on which the declaration of the independence of the United States was promulged.

mittee to execute the work in question. It was prepared by the three first named gentlemen; the first of them, now the president of the United States; the second, the president of the supreme court of appeals of Virginia; and the third, the judge of the high court of chancery, at this place.

I have perused this system of state police with admiration. It is evidently the work of minds of most astonishing greatness; capable at once of a grand, profound, and comprehensive survey of the present and future interest and glory of the whole state; and of pursuing that interest and glory through all the remote and minute ramifications of the most extensive and elaborate detail.

Among other wise and highly patriotic bills which are proposed, there is one for the more general diffusion of knowledge. After a preamble, in which the importance

of the subject to the republic is most ably and eloquently announced, the bill proposes a simple and beautiful scheme, whereby science (like justice under the institutions of our Alfred) would have been "carried to every man's door." Genius, instead of having to break its way through the thick opposing clouds of native obscurity, indigence, and ignorance, was to be sought for through every family in the commonwealth; the sacred spark, wherever it was detected, was to be tenderly cherished, fed, and fanned into a flame; its innate properties and tendencies were to be developed and examined, and then cautiously and judiciously invested with all the auxiliary energy and radiance of which its character was susceptible.

What a plan was here to give stability and solid glory to the republic! If you ask me why it has never been adopted, I answer, that, as a foreigner, I can per-

ceive no possible reason for it, except that the comprehensive views and generous patriotism which produced the bill, have not prevailed throughout the country, nor presided in the body on whose vote the adoption of the bill depended. I have new reason to remark it, almost every day, that there is throughout Virginia a most deplorable destitution of public spirit, of the noble pride and love of country. Unless the body of the people can be awakened from this fatal apathy; unless their thoughts and their feelings can be urged beyond the narrow confines of their own private affairs; unless they can be strongly inspired with the public zeal, the *amor patriæ* of the ancient republics, the national embellishment, and the national grandeur of this opulent state, must be reserved for very distant ages.

Adieu, my S......., perhaps you will hear from me again before I leave Richmond.

FROM THE VIRGINIA GAZETTE.

AN APOLOGY

IN REPLY TO A HINT.

THE letters of the British Spy were furnished to amuse the citizens of the town and country; and not to give pain to any one human being. Accordingly, nothing has been said in censure of the integrity, the philanthropy, the benevolence, charity, or any other moral or religious virtue or grace of any one Virginian, who has been introduced into those letters. Nothing indeed could be justly said on those heads, in censure of either of the gentlemen. It is true, that some letters have been published, which have attempted to analize the *minds* of three or four well

known citizens of this state, and in order to designate them more particularly, a a description of the *person* and *manner* of each gentleman was given. This has been called " throwing stones at other people's glass houses," and the person who has communicated those letters (gratuitously styled their " author") is politely reminded that he himself resides " in a glass house."

If this be correctly understood, it implies a threat of *retaliation;* but all that the laws of *retaliation* could justify, would be to amuse the town and country with a description of the *person*, *manner*, and *mind* of the author (as he is called) of the British Spy. He fears, however, that it would puzzle the hinter, whatever his genius may be, to render so barren a subject interesting and amusing to the public; and he would be much obliged to the hinter if he could make it appear that he (the furnisher of the letters) de-

serves to be drawn into comparison, either as to person, manner, or mind, with any one of the gentlemen delineated by the British Spy. As to his person, indeed, he is less solicitous; the defects of that were imposed on him by nature; and there is no principle better established than this general principle of eternal truth and justice, that no man ought to be censured for contingencies over which he had no control. As to his manner, he has as little objection to a public description of that as his person.

To save the trouble of others, however, he relinquishes all pretensions either to the striking elegance which is calculated to excite admiration and respect, or to the conciliating grace and vital warmth which are qualified to gain enthusiastic friends. His manner is probably such as would be produced, nine times out of ten, by the rustic education to which he was exposed.

As to his mind, it is almost such as nature made it. He cannot boast with Gray, that "science frowned not on his humble birth." But what of this? A man may very accurately anatomize the powers of a mind far superior to his own. It is not improbable that Zoilus' criticisms of Homer were just; since every nod of Homer's was a fair subject of criticism. Yet who will suppose that Zoilus could have produced such a work as the Iliad? It is impossible to read Dennis's criticisms of Addison's Cato without being forcibly struck with their justice, and wondering that they have never before occurred to ourselves. Yet there is no man, who will therefore pronouce the genius of Dennis equal to that of Addison. These facts are so palpable and so well understood, that the person who furnished the letters of the British Spy (even if he had been their author) could scarcely have had the presumption to suppose, nor, I trust, the injustice to desire, that the public would pronounce his mind free from the defects,

much less endued with the energies and beauties of those which he criticises.

But where is the harm which has been done? Who are the gentlemen introduced into the British Spy? Are they young men just emerging into notice, and concerning whom the public have yet to form an opinion? Far from it. They are gentlemen who have long been, and who still, are displaying themselves in the very centre of the circle of general observation. They have not hid their light under a bushel. Their city is built on a high hill. There is not a feature of their persons, nor a quality of their mind or manner, which has not been long and well known, and remarked, commented on, criticised, repeated, and reiterated a thousand and ten thousand times in every circle and every corner of the country.

Was it in the power, then, of any remarks in an anonymous and fugitive newspaper publication, either to injure or

serve gentlemen so well and so extensively known? On the contrary, if those remarks were untrue, they would be instantaneously and infallibly corrected by the public opinion and knowledge of the subject; if the remarks were true, they would add no new fact to the public opinion and the public knowledge. Thinking thus, nothing was more distant, either from the expectation or wish of the person who has furnished the press with the letters of the British Spy, than that he was about to do an injury to the character, or to inflict a wound on the feelings of any citizen of the country. Why could he have expected or wished any such effect? He could not have been actuated by resentment; for neither of those gentlemen have ever done him an injury. He could not have been moved by personal interest; since his conscious inferiority, as well as the nature of his pursuits, remove him far from the possibility of being ever brought into collision with either of those gentle-

men. He could not have been impelled by diabolical envy, or the malicious agony of blasted ambition; since his country has already distinguished him far, very far, beyond his desert. And of the malevolence of heart which could intentionally do a wicked, a wanton, and unprovoked injury, he is persuaded that either of the gentlemen, if they knew him, would most freely and cheerfully acquit him.

If he be asked why he published the letters describing those characters? He answers,

First, for the same reason that he would, if he could, present to the town a set of landscape paintings, representing all the lovely prospects which belong to their beautiful city; to furnish them with the amusement and pleasure, which arise from surveying an accurate picture of a well known original: and this implies, that he could not have believed himself adding

new information, as to the originals themselves.

Secondly, he hoped that the abstracted and miscellaneous remarks, which were blended with the description of those characters, might not be without their use to the many literary young men who are growing up in Virginia.

If the letters of the British Spy have gone beyond these purposes; if they have given pain to the gentlemen described; (for as to doing them an injury, it is, certainly, out of the question) there is no man in the community disposed to regret it more sensibly than the man who furnished those letters for publication.

But while honour and justice compel the writer of this article to give these explanations, and make these acknowledgments to the gentlemen immediately interested, he begs he may not be con-

sidered as descending to the meanness of begging mercy on his own "glass house." On the contrary, the person who has published the polite hint in question, is welcome to commence his assault as soon as he pleases. He can scarcely point out one defect in the person, manner, or mind of this writer, of which he is not already conscious. And if he meant by his menace any thing more; if he meant to insinuate a suspicion to the public, that the honesty, integrity, or moral purity, of the man who furnished the letters of the British Spy for publication, are assailable on any ground of truth; if such was his intention, he has intended an injury, at which this writer laughs in proud security: an injury, for which his own heart, if it be a good one, will not forgive him so soon, as will the heart of the man whom he has attempted to injure.

The writer of this article tenders in return this hint to the hinter: that before

he commences his hostile operations, he will be sure of his man. As to the person who really did furnish the British Spy—the finger of conjecture has been erroneously pointed at several who reside in this state. It would be unjust and barbarous to punish the innocent for the guilty, if guilt can be justly charged on the British Spy.

LETTER X.

Richmond, December 10.

In one of my late rides into the surrounding country I stopped at a little inn to refresh myself and my horse; and as the landlord was neither a Boniface nor "mine host of the garter," I called for a book, by way of killing time, while the preparations for my repast were going forward. He brought me a shattered fragment of the second volume of the Spectator, which he told me was the only book in the house, for "he never troubled his head about reading;" and by way of conclusive proof, he further informed me, that this fragment, the only book in the house, had been sleeping unmolested in the dust of his mantlepiece for ten or fifteen years. I could not meet my venerable countryman in a foreign land, and in this humi-

liating plight, nor hear of the inhuman and gothic contempt with which he had been treated without the liveliest emotion. So I read my host a lecture on the subject, to which he appeared to pay as little attention as he had before done to the Spectator, and with the *sang froid* of a Dutchman answered me in the cant of the country, that he "had other fish to fry," and left me.

It had been so long since I had had an opportunity of opening that agreeable collection, that the few numbers which were now before me appeared almost entirely new; and I cannot describe to you the avidity and delight with which I devoured those beautiful and interesting speculations.

Is it not strange, my dear S......., that such a work should have ever lost an inch of ground? A style so sweet and simple, and yet so ornamented! a temper so be-

nevolent, so cheerful, so exhilarating! a body of knowledge and of original thought so immense and various; so strikingly just, so universally useful! What person of any age, sex, temper, calling, or pursuit, can possibly converse with the Spectator without being conscious of immediate improvement?

To the spleen he is as perpetual and never-failing an antidote as he is to ignorance and immorality. No matter for the disposition of mind in which you take him up; you catch as you go along the happy tone of spirits which prevails throughout the work; you smile at the wit, laugh at the drollery, feel your mind enlightened, your heart opened, softened, and refined; and when you lay him down, you are sure to be in a better humour both with yourself and every body else. I have never mentioned the subject to a reader of the Spectator who did not admit this to be the invariable process; and in

such a world of misfortunes, of cares, and sorrows, and guilt as this is, what a prize would this collection be if it were rightly estimated!

Were I the sovereign of a nation which spoke the English language, and wished my subjects cheerful, virtuous, and enlightened, I would furnish every poor family in my dominions (and see that the rich furnished themselves) with a copy of the Spectator; and ordain that the parents or children should read four or five numbers aloud every night in the year. For one of the peculiar perfections of the work is, that while it contains such a mass of ancient and modern learning, so much of profound wisdom and of beautiful composition, yet there is scarcely a number throughout the eight volumes which is not level to the meanest capacity. Another perfection is, that the Spectator will never become tiresome to any one whose taste and whose heart remain uncorrupted.

I do not mean that this author should be read to the exclusion of others; much less that he should stand in the way of the generous pursuit of science, or interrupt the discharge of social or private duties. All the counsels of the work itself have a directly reverse tendency. It furnishes a store of the clearest argument, and of the most amiable and captivating exhortations, "to raise the genius and to mend the heart." I regret only that such a book should be thrown by, and almost entirely forgotten, while the gilded blasphemies of infidels, and "the noontide trances" of pernicious theorists, are hailed with rapture, and echoed around the world. For such I should be pleased to see the Spectator universally substituted; and, throwing out of the question its morality, its literary information, its sweetly contagious serenity, and the pure and chaste beauties of its style; and considering it merely as a curiosity, as concentering the brilliant sports of the finest cluster of geniuses that

ever graced the earth, it surely deserves perpetual attention, respect, and consecration.

There is, methinks, my S......., a great fault in the world, as it respects this subject: a giddy instability, a light and fluttering vanity, a prurient longing after novelty, an impatience, a disgust, a fastidious contempt of every thing that is old. You will not understand me as censuring the progress of sound science. I am not so infatuated an antiquarian, nor so poor a philanthropist, as to seek to retard the expansion of the human mind. But I lament the eternal oblivion into which our old authors, those giants of literature, are permitted to sink, while the world stands open-eyed and open-mouthed to catch every modern tinselled abortion as it falls from the press. In the polite circles of America, for instance, perhaps there is no want of taste and even zeal for letters. I have seen several gentlemen, who appear to

have an accurate, a minute acquaintance with the whole range of literature, in its present state of improvement: yet you will be surprised to hear, that I have not met with more than one or two persons in this country who have ever read the works of Bacon or of Boyle. They delight to saunter in the upper story, sustained and adorned as it is with the delicate proportions, the foliage and flourishes of the Corinthian order; but they disdain to make any acquaintance or hold communion at all with the Tuscan and Doric plainness and strength, which base and support the whole edifice.

As to Lord Verulam, when he is considered as the father of experimental philosophy, as the champion whose vigour battered down the idolized chimeras of Aristotle, together with all the appendant and immeasurable webs of the brain, woven and hung upon them by the ingenious dreamers of the schools; as the hero who

not only rescued and redeemed the world from all this darkness, jargon, perplexity, and error; but, from the stores of his own great mind poured a flood of light upon the earth, straightened the devious paths of science, and planned the whole paradise, which we now find so full of fragrance, beauty, and grandeur; when he is considered, I say, in these points of view, I am astonished that literary gentlemen do not court his acquaintance, if not through reverence at least through curiosity. The person who does so will find every period filled with pure and solid golden bullion: that bullion which several much admired posterior writers have merely moulded into various forms or beaten into leaf, and taught to spread its floating splendours to the sun.

This insatiable palate for novelty which I have mentioned has had a very striking effect on the style of modern productions.

The plain language of easy conversation will no longer do. The writer who contends for fame, or even for truth, is obliged to consult the reigning taste of the day. Hence, too often, in opposition to his own judgment, he is led to encumber his ideas with a gorgeous load of ornaments; and when he would present to the public a body of pure, substantial, and useful thought, he finds himself constrained to incrust and bury its utility within a dazzling case; to convert a feast of reason into a concert of sounds: a rich intellectual boon into a mere bouquet of variegated pinks and blushing roses. In his turn he contributes to establish and spread wider the perversion of the public taste; and thus, on a principle resembling that of action and reaction, the author and the public reciprocate the injury; just as, in the licentious reign of our Charles the Second, the dramatist and his audience were wont to poison each other's morals.

A history of style would indeed be a curious and a highly interesting one: I mean a philosophical as well as a chronological history: one which, besides marking the gradations, changes, and fluctuations exhibited in the style of different ages and different countries, should open the regular or contingent causes of all those gradations, changes, and fluctuations. I should be particularly pleased to see a learned and penetrating mind employed on the question, Whether the gradual adornment which we observe in a nation's style result from the progress of science; or whether there be an infancy, a youth, and a manhood in a nation's sensibility, which rising in a distant age, like a new-born billow, rolls on through succeeding generations with accumulating height and force, and bears along with it the concurrent expression of that sensibility, until they both swell and tower into the sublime—and sometimes break into the *bathos.*

The historical facts, as well as the metaphysical consideration of the subject, perplex these questions extremely; and, as Sir Roger De Coverley says, "much may be said on both sides." For the present I shall say nothing on either; except that from some of Mr. Blair's remarks, it would seem that neither of those hypotheses will solve the phenomenon before us. If I remember his opinion correctly, the most sublime style is to be sought in a state of nature; when, anterior to the existence of science, the scantiness of a language forces a people to notice the points of resemblance between the great natural objects with which they are surrounded; to apply to one the terms which belong to another; and thus by compulsion to rise at once into simile and metaphor, and launch into all the boldness of trope and figure. If this be true, it would seem that the progress of a civilized nation towards sublimity of style is perfectly a retrograde manœuvre: that is,

that they will be sublime according to the nearness of their approach to the primeval state of nature.

This is a curious and to me a bewitching subject. But it leads to a volume of thought which is not to be condensed in a letter. I will remark only one extraordinary fact as it relates to style. The Augustan age is pronounced by some critics to have furnished the finest models of style, embellished to the highest endurable point: and of this Cicero is always adduced as the most illustrious example. Yet it is remarkable, that seventy or eighty years afterwards, when the Roman style had become much more luxuriant, and was denounced by the critics of the day * as having transcended the limits of genuine ornament, Pliny the younger, in a letter to a friend, thought it necessary to enter into a formal vindication of three or four

* See Quinctilian's Institutes.

metaphors which he had used in an oration, and which had been censured in Rome for their extravagance; but which, by the side of the meanest of Curran's figures, would be poor, insipid, and flat. Yet who will say that Curran's style has gone beyond the point of endurance? Who is not pleased with its purity? Who is not ravished by its sublimity?

In England, how wide is the chasm between the style of Lord Verulam and that of Edmund Burke, or M'Intosh's Introduction to his *Vindiciæ Gallicæ!* That of the first is the plain dress of a Quaker; that of the two last the magnificent paraphernalia of Louis XIV. of France. In Lord Verulam's day, his style was distinguished for its superior ornament; and in this respect it was thought impossible to surpass it. Yet Mr. Burke, Mr. M'Intosh, and the other *fine* writers of the present age, have, by contrast, reduced Lord Verulam's flower-garden

to the appearance of a simple culinary square!

Perhaps it is for this reason, and because, as you know, I am an epicure, that I am very much interested by Lord Verulam's manner. It is indeed a most agreeable relief to my mind to turn from the stately and dazzling rhapsodies of the day and converse with this plain and sensible old gentleman. To me his style is gratifying on many accounts; and there is this advantage in him, that instead of having three or four ideas rolled over and over and over again, like the fantastic evolutions and ever-changing shapes of the same sun-embroidered cloud, you gain new materials, new information at every breath.

Sir Robert Boyle is, in my opinion, another author of the same description, and therefore an equal if not a higher favourite with me. In point of ornament he is the first grade in the mighty space

(through the whole of which the gradations may be distinctly traced) between Bacon and Burke. Yet he has no redundant verbiage; has about him a perfectly patriarchal simplicity; and every period is pregnant with matter. He has this advantage too over Lord Verulam: that he not only investigates all the subjects which are calculated to try the clearness, the force, and the comprehension of the human intellect: he introduces others also, in handling of which he shows the masterly power with which he could touch the keys of the heart, and awaken all the tones of sensibility which belong to man. Surely, if ever a human being deserved to be canonized for great unclouded intelligence, and seraphic purity and ecstasy of soul, that being was Sir Robert Boyle!

When I reflect that this "pure intelligence, this link between men and angels," was a Christian, and look around upon the petty infidels and deists with

which the world swarms, I am lost in amazement! Have they seen arguments against religion which were not presented to Sir Robert Boyle? His religious works show that they have not. Are their judgments better able to weigh those arguments than his was? They have not the vanity even to believe it. Is the beam of their judgments more steady and less liable to be disturbed by passion than his? Oh no! for in this he seems to have excelled all mankind. Are their minds more elevated and more capable of comprehending the whole of this great subject, with all its connections and dependencies, than was the mind of Sir Robert Boyle? Look at the men, and the question is answered. How then does it happen that they have been conducted to a conclusion so perfectly the reverse of his? It is for this very reason: because their judgments are less extricated from the influence and raised above the mists of passion: it is

because their minds are less ethereal and comprehensive; less capable than his was

"To look through nature up to nature's God."

And let them hug their precious, barren, hopeless infidelity: they are welcome to the horrible embrace! May we, my friend, never lose the rich and inexhaustible comforts of religion!

Adieu, my S.......!

The author of "An Inquirer," on the theory of the earth, begs leave to offer the following observations to the publisher of "The British Spy," in answer to some of his additional notes.

When the Inquirer read, in the second letter of the British Spy, that "the perpetual revolution of the earth from west to east has the obvious tendency to conglomerate the loose sands of the sea on the eastern coast;"—"that, whether the rolling of the earth to the east give to the ocean an actual counter-current to the west or not, the newly emerged pinnacles are whirled by the earth's motion through the waters of the deep;" and, from the continued operation of the causes which produced them, that "all continents and islands will be caused, reciprocally, to ap-

proximate;" when he read these and other similar passages, he saw no reason to doubt, that the British Spy considered the ocean *now*, as well as formerly, affected by the rotation of the earth; or, to express the same thing more correctly, that the rotatory motion of the earth is but partially communicated to the ocean. This opinion, which a thousand facts may be brought to disprove, and which the favourite cosmogonist of the British Spy says * no man can entertain who has the least knowledge of physics, it was decorous to suppose, had been advanced from inadvertence. If the meaning of the writer were taken by the Inquirer, in a greater latitude than was meant, he is not the less sorry for his mistake, because it was a natural one, and was not confined to himself.

* The passage in Smellie's translation of Buffon stands thus: "But every man, who has the least knowledge of physics, must allow, that no fluid, which surrounds the earth, can be affected by its rotation." Vol. I. On Regular Winds.

But the annotator of the Spy, without saying whether the supposed current now exist or not, thinks the *former* existence of such a current not improbable, and puts a case, by way of illustrating his hypothesis. My reasoning on the subject, somewhat different from his, is briefly this.

If the whole surface of the earth, when it first received its rotatory impulse, were covered with water, *and this impulse were communicated to its solid part alone*, then, indeed, a current to the west would be produced, and would continue until the resistance, occasioned by the friction of the waters, gradually communicated the whole motion of the earth to the ocean. It is not easy to say when this current would cease; but it seems to me, it would be more likely to wear the bed of the ocean smooth, than to raise protuberances; and even, though it were to cause sand-banks, it could never elevate them above its own level.

I should observe, that to avoid circumlocution, I admit a *current to the west*; because the effect is the same, as to alluvion, whether the earth revolve under the waters, or the waters roll over the earth; though the fact is, that the ocean, like the oil in the plate, in the experiment proposed, would have a tendency to remain at rest, and whatever motion it acquired, must be *to the east*, like that of the earth, from which it was derived.

If we suppose a few solitary mountains to lift their heads above the circumfluous ocean, we may infer, by the rules of strict analogy, that they would be worn away by the friction of the passing waters, rather than that they would receive any accessions of soil.

But let us suppose some ridges of mountains, running from north to south, and of sufficient extent and elevation to obstruct the course of the waters. In this

case, the sudden whirling of the earth to the east would force the ocean on its western shores, where it would accumulate, until the gravity of the mass, thus elevated, overcame the force which raised it. Then one vast undulation of the stupendous mass would take place, from shore to shore, and would continue until it gradually yielded to the united effect of friction and gravity. A comparison between vessels of different sizes, partly filled with water, might enable us to form a rational conjecture of the term of this oscillation; but be it one year, or many years, I think the effect would more probably be, an abrasion of the mountain, than the formation of a continent.

But the *postulatum*, that the first impulse to the earth was communicated to its solid part alone, on which all these suppositions rest, is but a possibility: whether we suppose that the cause, which first whirled the earth on its axis, is an

ascending link in nature's chain of causes, or the immediate act of the first Great Cause of all, it is not unlikely that it penetrated and influenced every particle of matter, whether it were solid, liquid, or aeriform.

On this subject, our suppositions are to be limited only by our invention. One man may resort to electricity, according to an alleged property of that fluid; another to magnetism; a third to the action of the sun's rays; and a fourth to a quality inherent in matter; according to either of which hypotheses no current could have existed.

Monsieur de Buffon, indeed, ascribes the earth's rotation to a mechanical and partial impulse, the *oblique* stroke of a comet; but as, according to him, the earth was then one entire globe of melted glass, its rotatory motion must have been uniform long before the ocean existed.

Whoever would dispel the clouds in which this question is enveloped, and make it as clear "as the light of heaven," should indeed be *mihi magnus Apollo:* but hypotheses, of which nothing can be said but that they are not impossible, though they may beguile the lounger of a heavy hour, are little likely to further our knowledge of nature. In so boundless a field of conjecture, with scarce one twinkling star to guide us, we can hardly hope to find, among the numberless tracks of error, that which singly leads to truth.

When the Inquirer spoke of the general *bouleversement* which many subterranean appearances indicated, he did not mean even to hint at their cause, but simply to express, as the word imports, the topsy-turvy disorder in which vegetable and marine substances are found: the one far *above*, and the other far *below*, the seat of its original production. At the moment he was attempting to show, that every

explanation of these phenomena was imperfect and premature, he hardly would have ventured to give one himself; for though "we should not suffer ourselves to be passively fed on the pap of science," *when we have attained our maturity*, yet, until we have attained it, he thinks it is better to be in leading-strings than to stumble at every step.

In the progress of science, I doubt whether sound principles are abandoned for those that are less true. Novelty in moral speculation, aided as it may be by our passions, may dazzle and mislead; but in physics, though one error may give place to another, when truth once gets possession she holds it firm ever after. Thus, the theories of cosmogonists follow one another like wave obtruding upon wave; each demonstrating the fallacy of those which went before, and proved absurd in turn; while the philosophy of Newton, in spite of the continued opposition of French

academicians, and the later reveries of St. Pierre, gradually gains universal credit and respect. The member of the Royal Society, who accounted for the trade winds by the transpiration of tropical sea-weed, may have had his admirers; but he has not been able to shake the theory of Dr. Halley. If Harvey's system of generation had been as well supported by facts, as his discovery of the circulation of the blood, all hostility to the one, as well as to the other, would have ended with his life.

It certainly is not philosophical "to discard a theory," because it may be unsupported by a name, nor yet because there are other more recent theories. In these and many other general remarks, I entirely concur with the writer, though I do not clearly discern their application.

I cannot conclude without regretting, that I should be compelled to differ with

a writer whose talents I so much admire, and whose sentiments I so often approve; but, to borrow a celebrated sentiment, my esteem for truth exceeds even my esteem for the British Spy. Though neither of us may chance to convince the other, yet if our discussion should lead those who have not the same parental tenderness, for particular hypotheses or doubts, to a better understanding of the subject, the light that is thus elicited will console me for the collision which produced it.

October 12, 1805.

THE END.

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